

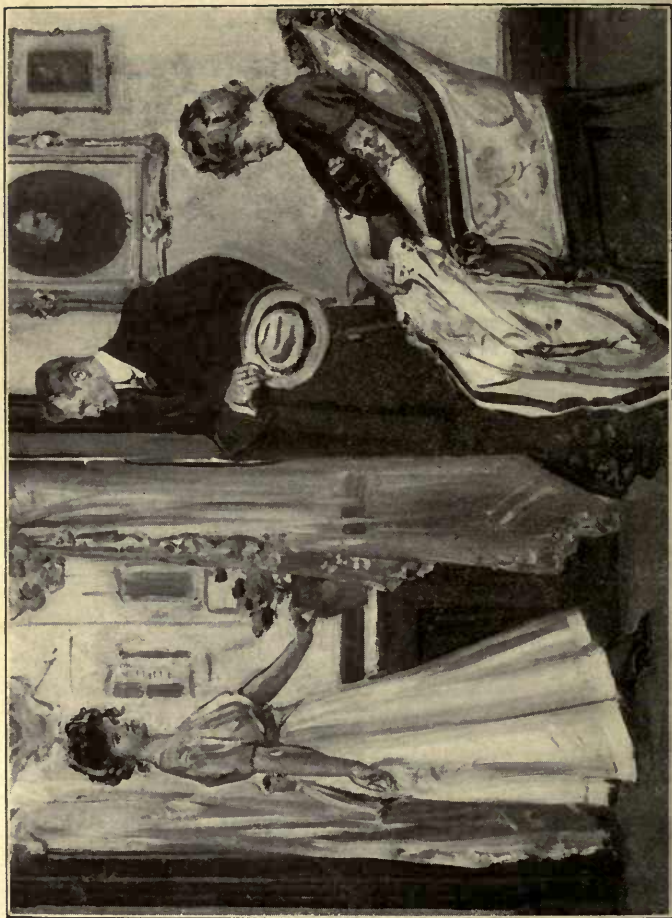
THE ENEMY

George Randolph
Chester &
Lillian Chester

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THE ENEMY

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Billy couldn't keep his eyes off the girl at the window: John Doe's Tavy!

THE ENEMY

By
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& LILLIAN CHESTER

Authors of "The Ball of Fire," etc.

Illustrated by
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CHAPTER I

THE STREET OF THE DEAD

UNCANNY stillness; a long, low, dim tunnel, uneasy with the shuffling specters of the voiceless damned; a rush, a rumble, a deafening clatter, a rumble and a dying rush; uncanny stillness again; the Bowery! Black, oily mire everywhere; even the snow, fine and clean and white as it sifts through the gloomy canopy of the elevated, turns to slime as it falls on the reeking pavement. Time was when that historic thoroughfare had pride in its lusty vice and flaunted a sort of gaiety, but now, as it lies gleaming under the long, confused perspective of iron pillars, its viscid tar-like surface reflecting the lights of the dingy shops, it is a street of the living dead; and in all its shuffling phantoms — hunch-shouldered figures with pocketed hands and glazed eyes and misshapen lips — there is none

more lost to life than the man who stands against a board fence, peering down into the excavation for the Pannard Building, the ruddy glow from that inferno-like pit touching with a fantastic mockery of healthful color the waxen hue of his face.

He is of no age, this man, and of no race, and of no station, and of no name. His beard, which might have been gray with washing, has been allowed to grow as it would, and is meshed and matted; his eyes are bleared and puffed; his brow is broad and high and full, but hidden by an absurdly shapeless hat, and the snow, melting from its crown, has run down in muddy rivulets across his face and into his beard, veining his sodden countenance with angling streaks of brown. He seems numbly fascinated, without apparently knowing why, in the weird scene which spreads below him.

The pit is huge and deep, its dimness shot by clustered lights, amidst which dark figures toil like imps in a far-off hell. There are voices from below there, hollow voices but vibrant with life, hoarse, sharp voices of command; and monster derricks, like giants enslaved, in obedience to the voices sweep their great arms from horizon to horizon, picking up and setting down with a pre-



"Eleven-fifteen, Billy" Geraldine warned him as he stepped out of the limousine

cision so marvelously human that understanding must be in their sinews; and as they lift and drop their tons, they groan!

Day after day, and night after night, the waxen face has, at intervals, peered numbly over that spot in the fence, for hours at a time, and there have been occasions when the brow has knotted, as if in an effort of concentration; but, for the most part, the man has gazed in the stupor of drink.

Radiant life came into the street of the dead. A big limousine, its great yellow eyes gliding forward as a symbol of its right and its might and its imperial will, stopped at the curb just opposite the waxen-faced watcher. The dome light flashed up within, revealing, amid the exquisitely grained woodwork and the luxurious corded gray upholstery, a jolly looking elderly man, a placid looking elderly lady, a tall, pleasant looking young man in a beaver hat, and a young lady, bewilderingly swathed in soft white furs, her richly tinted smiling face framed in a wealth of rippling light brown hair tinged with gold. Her brown eyes sparkled for a moment as she turned them on the tall young man.

"Eleven-fifteen, Billy," she warned him, as he stepped out of the limousine. "Not a minute later."

"I'll be there right after the cocktails," laughed Billy, hat in hand.

"How frank." The smiling retort seemed to please her father very much, and he chuckled.

"If you want Billy to be late, Geraldine, just keep on holding his hand." Three-B Benning was even more pleased with his own humor, for, as his shoulders shook, his face reddened and his puffy mustache rounded.

"Father!" protested Mrs. Benning in a tone so placid that it held no possibility of emotion of any sort.

Geraldine only laughed, though her face flushed slightly, as Billy hastily released her hand.

"I'll have to do some fiddling before I can dance," and the young man cast a quick glance toward the groaning giants of the pit. "Eleven-fifteen." He closed the door of the limousine, he gave each of the occupants a separate bow and a cheerful grin.

The dome light was extinguished, the limousine rolled away, and with its going all the light and life and warmth seemed to have disappeared from the world! The waxen-faced onlooker shivered.

A stockily built man came up out of Hades, by means of staged ladders, and appeared over

the top of the fence. He wore a heavy cap pulled down over his ears, and his mustache was dripping.

"Still sliding, Joe?" anxiously inquired Billy Lane.

"Nearly a quarter of an inch!" gravely reported the man from the pit.

The waxen-faced one did not hear. He was shivering so that his shoulders drew together and his teeth chattered, and a tremor seemed to run down his whole bowed body to his gaping shoes. Intelligence followed that awakening of his senses. The man knew exactly what to do. He turned and shuffled, trembling, down the street toward the Chicago Buffet, more popularly known as Mike Dowd's Sink. He walked with his head bent and his eyes to the ground. Once he stooped and picked up a water-soaked cigar butt, which he slipped in his bulging right-hand pocket, and a little farther on he found an iron nut. Left-hand pocket. These things, and bones and rags and empty bottles and the like, could be sold when there were enough of them.

The dingy Sink, with its frowsy habitués, was like a scene from Dante; but Mike Dowd was strictly material. He was a big, large-necked man, with a yellow mustache and a face as expres-

sionless as a stone post. He nodded gruffly as "the regular" drew up to the bar, but he made no other movement until a nickel was laid down with a quivering hand; then he deftly filled a small glass, brimful, from a worn looking bottle. The man drew a deep breath and reached for the drink, but time after time he withdrew his shaking hand, lest he should spill one drop of that life-giving liquid!

The well-dressed young man in the beaver hat, and the stocky man from the pit, with the heavy cap still pulled down over his ears, came briskly in, so intent that they scarcely noticed the total depravity of Mike Dowd's Sink, low and ill-smelling, and peopled with living carrion.

"Have you any good whisky?" dubiously asked the younger man, as he inspected the rickety back-bar, with its narrow cracked mirror and its scant assortment of bottles.

"Leave it to you," rumbled Mike Dowd, reaching under the stickily painted counter for a copper measure. "I got some at two bits a throw."

"Shoot it," accepted the young man in Mike's language, and with a smile which disclosed a set of even white teeth. He radiated so much good-fellowship that even the stone post gave him a half glance of approval, as he strode heavily to

the row of black barrels across the rear end of the room.

"We're up against it, Billy," said the stockily built man, wiping his dripping mustache, and there was a look of deep concern on his face. "That foundation is solid rock. It can't slide, and yet it does."

Billy Lane unconsciously studied the geometrical relation of four dents in the bar. He was troubled.

"I might as well go out of business if the big Pannard Building should loaf down toward the river one night." He moved forward as he felt an elbow touch his from behind. "Better stop the work until I investigate, Joe."

"Nothing else to do," worried the superintendent. "I wish Harrison Stuart were alive. He knew the geological formation underlying New York as if he had made it."

"If Harrison Stuart could stop that sliding, I can," declared Lane, laying a good fist on the edge of the bar. "First of all, however," and a laugh betrayed his perplexity, "I have to find out what causes it. The surveys show that site to be as solid as the universe itself."

"Survey's wrong!" husked a voice.

Startled, both men turned to find the waxen-

faced refuse peering up at them with strained brows. The man was soddenly drunk, but he was fairly trembling with his effort at concentration, and his bleared eyes were steady for the first time in weeks. He had drunk his whisky, and was holding the glass with a grip which would have crushed it had he been stronger.

"Beg pardon?" said Billy, in surprise.

"Shale up-cropping," went on the man, holding tightly to thought by his grip on the edge of the bar, and sliding slowly towards the young man in his earnestness. "Substratum — runs down there — like a trough. You're on the point." His brows began to relax, his eyes to dull, his voice to weaken. "Cut it off." His voice died away in a mumbling whisper. He leaned heavily against the bar. His head drooped.

If a genie had popped out of a bottle to solve their dilemma, they could have been no more amazed! That this distorted shell contained fragments of a cultivated intelligence was beyond comprehension! Looking at him, as he stood there relapsed into dullness, with his grimy hands and his matted beard and his dirt-streaked face, they could scarcely believe that it was he who had spoken!

"Well, what do you think of that!" gasped the superintendent.

"It's probably the answer," decided Billy, his mind delving below the Pannard excavation, and constructing a diagram of the tilted substratum. He bent eagerly over the bleared stranger. "Do you know the extent of this shale up-cropping?" he asked.

The frowsy one lifted his head, but the gleam of intelligence had gone from his eye.

"A little whisky," he mumbled, with a formless smile.

Mike Dowd had returned with the copper measure, and with great vigor was washing and bur-nishing two glasses.

"Give him a drink," suggested the superintendent.

"This good whisky'll kill him," grinned Mike, his yellow mustache lifting. "Hey, Bow-Wow! Have a drink? Of course you will!" and he poured it out and set it in Bow-Wow's hand.

The bent head raised quickly and the drooped shoulders straightened a trifle.

"Thank — you," and, in a trembling hand, the glass was held up and out, with an absurd attempt at formality. Mike laughed, but Billy

Lane turned on Bow-Wow that warm smile which had lined his path through life with friends.

"The same to you, sir," he replied with grave courtesy, and drank with the man. A look of gratification brightened the young architect's face as he tasted the liquor. "That's great stuff," he complimented Mike Dowd. "Can you stand another one, Joe?"

"One at a time for me," refused the superintendent, with a speculative, sidelong glance at his companion.

"I'm not too proud to drink by myself," laughed that young man gaily, and poured his diminutive glass two-thirds full. "It's a shame to let a good drink of whisky be lonesome."

"Whisky!" suddenly shouted Bow-Wow, with a sharp intake of his breath.

Billy Lane and his superintendent turned at the vehemence of the tone. The man's fists were clenched and his eyes were glistening. The human carrion on the benches grinned stupidly.

"It's the curse of the world!" went on the derelict, his voice rising shrilly. "There is no hell but whisky! Drink! It's the enemy of man and God! It burns the body and it sears the brain! It —"

"Can that!" interrupted big Mike, and reach-

ing across he gave a sharp jerk at the man's beard, by way of emphasis.

The orator instantly subsided. He set down his empty glass and shuffled across to a bench, where he huddled, mumbling unintelligibly and plucking nervously at his beard.

"I told you that two-bit whisky'd kill him," grinned big Mike.

"Who is he?" asked Billy.

"A bum," and the blond mustache came up. "He hands us that spiel every time he gets one drink past the corner."

"Where does he live?"

"Here."

Billy inspected Mike Dowd's Sink with a shudder. It was a narrow room, its rough board walls and ceiling painted a ghastly blue. It was lighted with small yellow bulbs, half obscured by clouds of stinking smoke. Along each wall were decrepit benches, and on these sat, puffing at their pipes, soiled and rumpled creatures, who, after an apathetic glance at the newcomers, had descended again into motionless, hopeless, lifeless silence. There was sawdust on the floor, which, by the tracking in of the slush, had been mixed into a mottled pasty mire.

"Where does he sleep?"

"In the alley. He crawls into an old coal box out there that's shaped like a kennel. That's why we call him Bow-Wow. He sweeps out in the morning, for a drink, and he's the only bum I ever had that don't steal."

The young man paid for his drinks, and buttoned his coat.

"I'm going to take him home and sober him up," he announced to the superintendent. "He knows all about the rock under the Pannard Building," and Billy walked across to Bow-Wow. Lord, what a debasing name! "Come on," and he touched the fellow on the shoulder.

"Eh?" The nodding head raised slowly.

"Come on!"

Bow-Wow half rose.

"Where?"

"Home!"

There was a rumble in Bow-Wow's throat, a rumble which began in a laugh and ended in a cough.

"A little whisky," he said.

CHAPTER II

TOMMY TINKLE

A BIG lounging-room, with rich hangings and soft leather chairs and couches; a huge log blazing in the fireplace, and casting its ruddy glow in fitful flares upon the well chosen pictures, upon the odds and ends of art from every quarter of the globe, and upon the glistening evening attire of Tommy Tinkle, who, with a highball at his elbow and a cigarette between his fingers, is sitting contentedly by Billy Lane's fireplace, in Billy Lane's favorite chair.

The lock clicked, the door opened, and Tommy turned lazily to greet his friend, but, instead of Billy Lane, there shuffled into this harmony, Bow-Wow! He stood blinking stupidly at the fire.

Billy followed briskly a second later. He closed the door, and leaned the swaying Bow-Wow against it; then he peeled off his gloves, threw them into a waste basket, and drew a long, deep breath.

"You're quite a collector," Tommy grinned

with appreciation. "Where did you get it, and what corner's it for?"

"Haven't decided," speculated the connoisseur, studying his prize with considerable wonder at himself. "Where's Burke?"

"Chipping highball ice," and long-legged Tommy obligingly rang.

For a moment there was silence, broken only by the stupor-like breathing of Bow-Wow, while the two young men studied the new guest with awe.

"Genuine antique or imitation?" finally inquired Tommy, but the laziness in his tone was now only superficial, for the fingers with which he clutched pencil and paper from the table were both agile and deft.

He was sketching Bow-Wow with great enjoyment when Burke came in, a pleasant-faced Irishman with three scars: one from the Boer War, one from a fight in China and one a memento of his sole attempt at domestication.

"A guest of mine, Burke," explained Billy, with solemn gravity; "Mr. John Doe."

"Yes, sir." Burke was equally grave, but there was a twinkle at the corners of his Killarney eyes as he surveyed John Doe. "The blue room, sir?"

Tommy Tinkle's ever-ready grin widened, as he observed the perplexity which this counter thrust cast upon Burke's master. What was to be done with the fellow, after all!

"The fire escape, I think," the host suggested in desperation. "However, Burke, he's up to you," and it was Billy's turn to grin, as he saw genuine worry flash into Burke's brow. "You will scrub my guest, feed him, and hold him here until my return."

"Yes, sir," assented the Irishman gloomily. "I suppose you prefer him sober."

Bow-Wow, having lurched dangerously along the door, once or twice, now aroused sufficiently to take part in the conversation.

"A little whisky!" he husked, and lurched again.

Burke gave an entirely perfunctory glance around the room. There was no place here to seat Mr. John Doe; no place in the kitchen; no place in any room.

"Excuse me, please." He hurried out, and came back wearing a pair of gloves. He took Billy's new guest by the arm and led him into the servants' bathroom, in which he had placed a coal pail.

"A little whisky!" husked Bow-Wow.

"Take off your clothes and throw them in this pail, shoes and all; then climb into the tub, and you'll get your whisky," directed Burke, and turned on the water. Billy was in his dressing-room, throwing things, when Burke returned.

Half an hour later, Billy and Tommy Tinkle were in the gaudiest of the private dining-rooms in one of New York's most superb up-town palaces of food; and they had minutes to spare.

"You need a drink, my boy," advised Tommy, as, properly slim in their swallow-tails, they entered the door and found themselves in company with no one but waiters, whom it was a distress to see idle. "Bow-Wow has had an entirely too sobering influence on you. Are you in any condition to join a gay and festive supper dance? No! Then, get pickled, Billy; get pickled!" and he motioned the solemn headwaiter to him.

"I don't have to be gay until the fun comes," retorted Billy, attempting to reach Tommy's height of glorious flippancy; but his somberness would not shake off. He was studying the familiar ornateness of the big empty room, as if, all at once, its luxury were strange to him, and his gaze strayed from the big chandelier, with its thousand iridescences, to the elaborately paneled

Louis Quinze walls. "Tremendous contrast between this and the Bowery."

"Wow!" said Tommy. "It's a lucky thing for you that I have ten minutes before the mob arrives." He turned to the headwaiter. "Six cocktails," he ordered. He turned briskly back to his friend. "You will get one drink every three and a third minutes," he explained, watch in hand.

"Sensible idea," laughed Billy, and they followed the headwaiter to the sideboard.

Young Lane, both his engineering and his psychological problems forgotten, was light of mood and sparkling of eye when the Benning party came chattering into the room.

There were twenty of them, mostly youthful and fresh-cheeked and care free; and the spirit of frivolity took possession of the place. It was as if a cyclone of merriment had suddenly burst into the prim stiffness of that gold and rose hall. There were laughing voices, flashing eyes, the gleam of pearly teeth, the curving of bewitching lips, the glitter of jewels, the rustle of filmy gowns, and all the gay bustle and confusion of such parties as jolly old B. B. Benning loved to give.

An orchestra, half screened by palms, struck into a lively march, and Billy found the tall and

graceful Miriam Hasselton beside him as the throng made its way to the table. Clever girl, Miriam, full of general appeal, and serenely conscious of it. A little light repartée between them, vague half-meanings which might or might not be turned into a laugh or a flirtation, but light as froth in its analysis.

Geraldine Benning slipped between pompous Joseph Gandish and Jack Greeves, to get at Billy. Miriam Hasselton was considered to be an acquired taste, like olives; but some people became very fond of olives. Tommy arrived at Miriam's side just as Geraldine reached them; so Geraldine swept both the boys away. They, at least, should not be Miriamized! She turned Tommy over to the dimpled little Parsons girl. Dolly Parsons could be trusted.

Geraldine snuggled her hand in Billy's arm. She was unusually pretty to-night, in her shimmering gown of silver tissue touched with green, and with her new tiara of diamonds and emeralds in her golden brown hair. As young Lane drew her hand in place, he patted it. She turned swiftly up to him, and her eyes were glowing. He drew her arm closer within his own. They were very fond of each other, these two; they had always

been. He bent down and whispered something to her, and a little ripple of laughter followed, then Geraldine flushed prettily.

"Here are our places!" she exclaimed, examining the cards on the table. "Here's mine, and there's yours, and next to you is pretty Leila Langster. You're in luck!"

"Indeed I am," and he helped her into her chair with exaggerated gallantry.

"Why, there's Billy Lane!" suddenly called Tommy Tinkle, taking his seat on the opposite side of the table, between the dimpled Parsons girl and the vivacious Mrs. Greeves. "Ladies and gentlemen, Billy has a Bow-Wow!"

"Billy's always doing something interesting," drawled Miriam Hasselton, bending past her thick partner to look at the young man, who was quite pink and jovial this evening. "What kind of a bow-wow has Billy?"

"A booze Bow-Wow!" returned Tommy solemnly. "Here's to him, old friend."

"You didn't tell me you had a new dog," protested Geraldine.

"Tommy Tinkle has given way to an overstrained sense of humor," explained Billy, with a cheerful grin at the young man in question, who

was making a rapid sketch on his napkin. "I happened to find a poor devil down in the Bowery whose only name in Mike Dowd's Sink, beg everybody's pardon, is Bow-Wow." His eyes, which had been shining, began to grow thoughtful.

"Feed him his cocktail quick, Geraldine!" called Tommy as one in a panic. "He's growing morbid again. Friends and fellow citizens, behold Bow-Wow!" and he displayed his napkin, on which he had sketched a caricature of John Doe.

Everybody laughed, with the exception of sharp-featured Mrs. Gandish, who objected on general principles to the introduction of such a thought into so select a company. Mrs. Gandish herself had not been long in this company.

"Begins to sound like a story," suggested Host Benning, beaming across with great satisfaction, and lifting his glass.

"Not much of a one. The foundation for the Pannard Building is rather unstable, and this fellow seemed to have some information about the substrata there; so I'm trying to sober him up to see if he knows anything. That's all."

"It isn't half!" denied Tommy Tinkle. "We have among us a simon-pure, dyed-in-the-wool philanthropist! Where do you suppose Bow-

Wow is being sobered. In William Lane's apartments!"

There was a general flutter of consternation at this, and Geraldine turned with concern.

"But, Billy!" she protested. "He might do something desperate; kill you in the night or something!"

"Not with Burke there," he reassured her. "Besides," and now he spoke generally, since they all seemed interested, "I rather trust the fellow. I think that, at one time, he may have been an engineer of some standing."

"Nonsense!" It was the pompous Joseph Gandish who spoke. He was a big man, whose chest traveled far ahead of him and whose habitual expression of eye was one of ferocity. "A man who is worth his salt never sinks that low!"

"Yes he does," corrected B. B. Benning, whose acquaintance had been wide and varied. "Hard liquor has sent many a man that low; and he never comes back!"

There was a quiet moment after that, for Benning had spoken with unwonted seriousness for him. The awkward little pause was broken by Tommy Tinkle, who loathed awkward little pauses.

"Billy, let this be a solemn warning to you!"

he declared with mock gravity. "You like hard liquor. Beware! Billy, we behold you now in the flush of your young manhood, your constitution as yet unimpaired by hard liquor. There passes but a few years, and it is thus that we shall behold you!" He had taken the fresh napkin which a waiter had laid before him, and now, with a few deft strokes, he started to draw a caricature of Billy Lane, as that eminent young engineering architect would look when he became Old Bill.

"Tommy!" cried Geraldine, and there was such distress in her voice that even the irrepressible Tommy stopped and read the dawning horror in every face. He grinned to Geraldine, and, before the dimpled Parsons girl could snatch the napkin from under his hand, he had finished the sketch; but lo, it portrayed Old Bill as a splendidly preserved gentleman, with a rakish air, a wink in his jovial eye, and a cocktail in his hand!

"The peace of the evening having thus been restored by sacred truth, I move that we be merry," suggested Tommy. "This is no place for engineering, or philanthropy, or," and here he winked prodigiously at Three-B Benning, "or temperance."

That broke the only touch of seriousness which the jolly Benning party endured that evening; and

the host was happy in consequence, for he loved laughter better than wine. This was saying a great deal, for Benning was a connoisseur in wines, and there was plenty of it at his supper.

Billy was fond of wine, too. He was fond of almost anything to drink, and he imbibed quite freely, especially during the exhilaration of the dancing which followed the supper. The wine seemed to agree with him. It made him more animated. Handsome fellow, Billy, with his broad shoulders and his well poised head, his good nose and chin and jaw. It became him to cast off his business cares, and indulge in a little hilarity. It was Tommy Tinkle's turn, however, to drive home with the Bennings.

Tommy kept them laughing all the way. Great chap, Tommy! Natural comedian. Three-B Benning, who had gained the soubriquet from his signature, laughed less than the others, for he was always respectful of Tommy's wit. There was an underlying keenness in it, which gave Benning a higher degree of enjoyment than laughter could express.

Tommy remained in the vestibule with Geraldine, and chattered for a few moments after her placid mother and her jovial father had gone in. She was wonderfully pretty, with the soft light

of the quaint old lamp shining down on her.

They remained an unusually long time, and when Geraldine bade him good night, she smiled on him with extra sweetness. His familiar grin was the last thing she saw, as she closed the door; but, as the latch clicked, a little spasm of pain twitched Tommy's humorous face. It was the first time he had ever proposed.

CHAPTER III

“ IN THE SILENCE OF BLACK NIGHT ”

THAT numb carcass which was Bow-Wow stirred uneasily. Something was wrong. A mattress; clean linen; silken pajamas; a bath. The body of Bow-Wow resented these things long before his soddened mind could comprehend them. His body missed the knotted rags upon which it had lain each night; it missed the cramping touch of the kennel, head, foot and shoulder; it missed the gusts of wind, cold and wet or hot and stifling, which had swept upon him through the cracks of the box in the alley; so the body rebelled. It rolled, it twisted, it straightened and bent, until it became aware of a new uneasiness; and this was the heavy dose of “ fixer ” which Burke had inserted into Bow-Wow as a substitute for whisky.

There is no resisting the ultimate command of the body. When it is born, a mind and a soul spring into existence. When it has reached its

time to die, the mind and the soul have no say in the matter; so, in this life, the body is always supreme. It demands to be fed, to have its thirst quenched, to lie in slothful slumber; and, if it be refused these things, it ousts mind and soul.

The body of Bow-Wow commanded his mind to awaken; and it did; awakened to its full strength, to its full intellectual capacity, to the full measure of its understanding; and all those mental powers were comprised in one muttered word, which broke huskily upon the silence of the black night:

“ Whisky! ”

Bow-Wow opened his eyes. Darkness, shot with glimmering light. He reached out his arms. Space! Groaning he sat up painfully, and endeavored to locate himself. Through a small window there came the faint illumination of the street, and the moist air of the snow. A door stood ajar, letting through a slit of dim radiance from the room beyond. Bow-Wow shivered. He was thinly clad. He had been used to sleeping in all his clothes! He was trembling, too, from head to foot, with a strange nausea.

What was this thing which had happened to him? He was in a narrow, white room, and his bed had been improvised on the top of a bath-

tub, two mattresses deep. How had he come here? In all his fuddled consciousness, he could find no trace of an answer to that mystery, and the effort at any thought further than his physical self, wearied, and weakened, and sickened him. He gave up the vague and feeble attempt at reasoning, and returned to the one idea which he could comprehend — whisky!

He rose, and tottered out of the bathroom. He found himself in a softly carpeted hall. There was a light at the end, a flickering, wavering red glow. With many a stop for breath and strength, and steadying of nerves, he edged along the wall until he reached a large lounging-room, comfortable with leather chairs and couches, where a half spent log in the fireplace cast the ruddy reflections of its dying flames upon well-chosen pictures and queer objects of art from every quarter of the world. Dazed, bewildered, he stood swaying, and blinked stupidly at the fire.

“What are you after, Pop — whisky?”

The lips of Bow-Wow spread in a formless smile.

“A little whisky,” he husked, even before he turned to look at the clear-eyed Burke, in robe and slippers, and with his red hair touseled in a thousand curling points.

"Let's have a look at your eyes, sport." Without ceremony, Burke flashed on a light, drew Billy Lane's guest to it and pulled apart the lids of his right eye. He nodded in business-like satisfaction, and left Bow-Wow standing by the fireplace while he went out into the pantry. He was back in a moment, and gave the man a glass with a carefully measured spoonful of whisky in it. Bow-Wow clutched at the glass with desperate eagerness! He lifted it to his lips with a trembling hand, and, after he had drunk it, he shivered from head to foot.

"Now drink this," commanded Burke.

"This" was a greenish compound, which the man swallowed obediently; then he docilely allowed Burke to lead him back to bed.

Two hours passed. Again the body of Bow-Wow rose in imperious command over the seared mind and soul.

"Whisky!" he gasped, awakening with a jerk. He was only a moment now in coming to consciousness of his surroundings.

In the kennel he had spent the nights, from one o'clock until dawn, with only occasional cravings, which he could resist until Mike Dowd's bartender opened the Sink; but in this strange environment and under the influence of the medicine which

Burke had given him, his craving had become imperative! There was a burning in him, there was fever in his veins, and yet he shivered with the cold.

"Whisky! whisky!" His quavering voice started with a whine and ended in a wail.

He knew a barrel-house down near the bridge which kept open all night. He had fifteen cents in his pocket. Three drinks! The sort of memory which is little more than instinct told him these things. He began a nervous, groping search for his clothes.

"What's the matter, Pop?"

The voice of Burke, clear, strong, hearty, and still with an underlying gruffness. Suddenly Bow-Wow detested that voice!

The inherent prompting for freedom had come upon him. He was cramped here! He began to be aware of coercion; and there is no human soul so debased, so feeble, that in its depths it does not resent coercion!

"My clothes!" he demanded.

"Burnt up, Pop," was the cheerful reply. "Have a drink?"

Cunning knotted the eyes of Bow-Wow. He nodded and grunted. He took the drink; but he refused the green potion.

"My clothes!" he demanded. He had forgotten that they were burned.

"Nothing doing, old top," Burke yawned. "Billy says you're to stay until he comes back; and you'll stay if I have to show you to him with a lily in your hands."

The bleared eyes of Bow-Wow narrowed.

"Lemme out!" he cried, in a high, wavering voice which rose nearly to a shriek.

"Come on, Pop, be a good little sport. You might as well think you're in luck and be happy. God knows why you're here, but here you stay! And if you holler too loud, I'll have to bat you."

The man subsided. The threat was one he could understand.

"A little drink!" he begged.

Burke studied him carefully, then he went out to the pantry. He found Bow-Wow behind him.

"A big drink!"

Burke calmly poured, measuring the quantity like a druggist. Suddenly the decanter was snatched from his hand, and its mouth flashed up to Bow-Wow's lips! He had gulped down three or four ounces before the decanter was recovered.

"Now you've done it!" worried the soldier of fortune, who had gained his experience in field

hospitals, and in mining camps, and in private service. "Get back to bed!"

Bow-Wow grinned. A leer of triumph was in his eyes. Without a word, he turned and reeled back to his couch, while Burke locked up the liquor.

Burke did not retire this time. He put a fresh log on the fire in the lounging-room. He went into his own apartment, brought out a battered little old surgical case, produced a hypodermic syringe, washed it and asepticized it, laid a little phial of tablets on the mantel beside it, set a glass of water with these, lit the charred briar which had been a soldier of fortune with him, and sat down to wait with calm philosophy. Three o'clock. It was time for Billy; past time, in these days when the young architect had so much important work on hand. Instinctively Burke's eyes roved to the glass of green liquid which Bow-Wow had refused. He'd probably have to make a fresh dose for his master. He sighed and shook his head, and worry came upon his brow. He liked Billy.

The quarter chimed; the half; the three-quarters. Burke heard them all, and heard, too, every machine which stopped in the street; and as the time passed, the shadow on Burke's brow deep-

ened. How many nights he had sat thus by the fire, waiting; waiting until the dawn streaked the sky. Such nights had become more frequent of late. They had come so frequently that Burke awoke naturally at two o'clock, if Billy had not called him. The hour struck, and Burke did not hear it. He was asleep in the stiffest of the leather chairs, and his pipe was on the floor.

A voice roused him, a thin, high-pitched, wavering voice. The dawn was stealing in at the window.

"Jean!" called the voice. "Jean!"

Bow-Wow; he stood, swaying, in the center of the room, gazing about him with widened eyes, and there was no need now for Burke to pull open the man's lids.

"Where's Tavy's doll?" went on the wavering voice. "Jean! Tavy's sick!" The voice mumbled and muttered, and rose and fell, as the man stumbled about the room in a groping search for something, he knew not what. He was a grotesque figure, a monstrous figure, bent and weaving in his loose pajamas, with his straggling hair and beard. Burke had scrubbed these hirsute adornments, and now the man's hair stood out in a silvery-white aureole, which, contrasting with his staring, reddened eyes, gave him an aspect

of uncanny wildness. "Jean!" The voice was sharper, higher pitched, more querulous. "That bridge contract, Jean! I can't find it!" Again an unintelligible muttering. There was a noise in the hall outside. The man, startled, listened intently. "What's that!" A sharper tone, but with fear in it.

Burke quietly rose and went to the mantel. He opened the little phial and tried to shake one of the pellets into his palm. They had been there a long time, and they stuck. He shook and shook the phial.

Suddenly there was a piercing scream, a comingling of terror, of rage, of frenzy, of all the wild emotions which a disordered fancy could conjure up! Before Burke could turn, the man was upon him from behind, and clutching his throat with long, lean fingers, in which there was maniacal strength!

CHAPTER IV

ON THE WAY

WHAT a hilarious place is the world!
How jovial is life! Who gives a rap
for 'dull care? Work was made for
slaves. Life is short and you're a long time dead.
Fill 'em up again, boys, and let's laugh at some-
thing. No, let's sing a song. Who'll oblige?
Tommy Tinkle! No evidence of alcoholic excess
about good old Tommy Tinkle. There he stands,
clear-eyed, chin up, and with that whimsical grin
on his wide face. He even seems extra humor-
ous since his return from the Bennings'. It is
scarcely an hour since that twitch of pain which
followed the click of the latch. Will Tommy
Tinkle lead in song? To be sure! Listen.

"The Demon Rum is a grand old friend,
He cripples your frame from end to end;
He starves your wife, he makes you a bum,
So here's a toast to the Demon Rum.

Tum — Tum!"

Ha, Ha! Great little song that! Eh, fellows? That's Tommy Tinkle for you! Always something fresh and original. Have a drink, Tommy! Now let's all sing it!

Everybody sings it, with particular emphasis on the tum-tum; a double slap of the hands on the club bar. Billy Lane's voice is 'among the rest, a strong sympathetic baritone, but just now a little uncertain as to key. Billy's silk hat is on the back of his head, and his hair is rumpled. The other fellows have their hats in the check-room, but Billy's going home in a minute or so for the past hour. He has an important business engagement in the morning. In the meantime, he's having the session of his life!

Have a drink, Tommy! Have a drink, Sam! What's yours, Bert? Come on, fellows, let's sing. Where's Jack Greeves? We want a good bass. Oh, here you are, Jack, right at my elbow. Been standing here an hour, eh? What do you think of that! Drink up and have another, Jack. Now, Tommy, The Demon Rum! What a jolly world it is, to be sure! Everybody's a fine fellow!

Tommy Tinkle vetoes the idea of more song. Why be monotonous, when life is so full of the different? Tommy gives a lecture on the Demon

Rum, with all his friends and himself as the horrible example. Screamingly funny thing! Tommy, with a keen and clever wit, hits off the foibles and peculiarities of each one in the crowd; and the place resounds with laughter. Wonderful chap, Tommy! Especially snappy to-night. Have a drink, old man! Encore! Encore! You skipped Sam Langster, Tommy!

No. Tommy will not conclude or continue his lecture on the Demon Rum. He will draw a picture of the Demon Rum, that they may see with their own eyes this devouring monster, and be properly warned!

Where's a sheet of paper? Where's crayon? Tommy Tinkle's going to draw! Here they are, produced like magic out of nowhere; a big sheet of coarse yellow paper and a box of colored crayons. The sheet of paper is tacked on the wall.

That's a magnificent piece of art, an astounding work; a fangless, snarling, blear-eyed genie of depravity, peering out of a somber blue pit, and surrounded by weird green and yellow vapors, dark red eyes, dark red tongue and mouth, and a face criss-crossed by countless little purple and blue and red blood veins. It is a terrible thing; a ghastly thing!

But Tommy Tinkle is not yet through, and the

wide grin beneath his pointed nose is a creature of active life in itself. An idea from the supper party has been left over in Tommy's wayward brain; and he adds a few deft strokes.

Why, it's Billy Lane! Great stuff, Tommy! The laughter is long and loud. There is no stopping it. The fellows fairly double up with joy, and have to sit down and rest, and have their drinks brought to them. Among the loudest of the laughers is Billy Lane. No one has a keener appreciation of genius than he, and there is no one more capable of taking a joke on himself. By George, that's a masterpiece! Billy claims it. He's going to take it home and frame it!

Where's Jack Greeves? Why, here he is in the corner, asleep. Where's Sam Langster? What, is Sam gone? Yes, they took him out to his chauffeur. Where's Bert? Where's Hal? Where's Charley? Where's the bunch? Scattered; dropped out one at a time. Here, this won't do! There's still light and laughter and gaiety in the world! Wake up, Jack, we're going to sing! Dead; dead to the world; dead, all but his snore. It occurs to Tommy Tinkle to utilize a ticker waste-basket and some of the coarse yellow paper, and to erect a tombstone at Jack's feet; which is accordingly done; but there is no one,

aside from the club attendants, to laugh at it, except Billy and Tommy. They are all alone in the world, and the world looks dim. See; out of the windows the dawn is breaking. It's too late to go to bed.

Tommy Tinkle has another flash of genius. Billy's car is waiting. They know a roadhouse where the proprietor makes his own sausage. Suppose they ride out there for breakfast, wake up old Christian and have some sausage and eggs. Bar boy, put us up a bottle of the club special.

Billy has a thought. Suppose they run up to Tommy's rooms and change their clothes. Suppose they have a cold shower. Why, they'll be fresh for the day. Billy will be in a fine shape for that business appointment. Done. Done in no time at all. As they dash down for the bottle of club special, on their way out, Billy discovers the Demon Rum, its red eyes gleaming on him with a peculiarly challenging leer. Come along, Demon Rum. Have a little morning ride. The Demon Rum, still with that knowing leer in his red eyes, permits himself to be taken from the wall, rolled up and tucked under Billy's arm. Ha, Ha! Billy Lane is a young man worth while; a young man with a sound body, a clear brain, brilliant prospects, and with already a rec-

ord of achievements of which any young man might well be proud! Just the sort for the Demon Rum; and in his roll of yellow paper, he leers his red leer and snarls his red snarl!

Out in the crisp, cool morning. The snow has stopped, and the sky is clearing, the clouds in the east are tinged a delicate rose. Glorious to be out in the dawning day; glorious to drive swiftly through the invigorating air; glorious to have the still sleeping world to one's self amid the lifting mists of the morning; glorious to have youth, friends, laughter!

The Demon Rum rests alongside Billy in the car. Geraldine! By George, Tommy, Geraldine would love the fresh morning ride. Let's go back and get her. The idea does not appeal to Tommy. Not because it's unconventional, for Three-B Benning and Geraldine's placid mother have more than once sanctioned expeditions as informal as this; but Tommy feels that the fact that they stayed up, rather than got up, makes a slight difference.

It's Billy's car. They go back after Geraldine. That charming young lady, roused by a still sleepy maid, appears presently in as pink perfection as if she had taken hours to make her toilette. She is in an astounding pretty pink morning frock,

and her eyes are sparkling and her cheeks fresh and her laugh gay as she trips down the stairs. Always in for a lark, is Geraldine, especially with Tommy and Billy.

She stops abruptly as she sees them in the light! Tommy is grinning cheerfully, but his eyes show the effect of the wind. Billy is grinning, too, but it is a set grin, with no meaning, but just general good nature. Hilarious world we're living in; great place for a joke, eh Tommy? Poor Billy!

Will Geraldine join them in a fresh little morning run out to old Christian's, for sausage and eggs? She will not! Most emphatically, she will not! She takes it upon herself to scold both boys sharply for their utterly senseless indiscretion; for spending the night with companions far beneath them; for permitting themselves to fall into this disgraceful condition, and, first and foremost, last and finally, for presuming to come here!

A monk-like figure spats down the stairs, in broad sandals and high-girthed robe and crumpled cowl; Three-B Benning. He has felt it his duty to investigate. There is a twinkle of understanding in his eyes as he surveys the boys, and a sly purpose springs instantly into his mind.

Why don't they stay here to breakfast? Ham hash, with poached eggs; a triumph of matutinal

culinary art. Good old Benning! Of course they'll stay! Skillful idea, that! B. B. will entertain the boys himself, and can set them back upon their normal way! But Geraldine vigorously vetoes the suggestion; and the Demon Rum, rolled snugly in Billy's pocket, and poking up between his arm and his overcoat lapel, leers his red leer and snarls his red snarl! What a worth-while young man Billy is; a game with which any hunter might well be pleased.

The aggravating part of it is that the boys are still happy, the world is still a hilarious place, life is still jovial, and a scolding, especially from a fluffy pink person like Geraldine, is only funny. Fatal viewpoint! Geraldine, with a little sweep of temper, which would have been merely piquant to Billy had he not carried that roll of paper under his arm, energetically explains that the Benning house is not a sanitarium, that the boys shall go right ahead and sink to just as low a stage of brutal degradation as it is possible for them to attain! Go finish the spree! Good-by!

Finish the spree, eh? Fine idea! There has come a stubborn set on Billy's lips and a hard glint in Billy's eye. Poor Billy! But where is the roll of yellow paper? Gone! Was that it flashing down through the grating of the areaway,

or did it pop straight up in the air and fly back to the Devil? There is not much difference, because the Demon Rum is not on the roll of yellow paper. It has jumped straight into Billy Lane, where it ensconces itself gleefully, and howls for drink! Come on, Tommy, thanks Three B. No, can't stop in. Got a date with the Demon Rum. Come on, Tommy. I say, come on!

Glorious to be out in the early morning, eh, Tommy, glorious to drive swiftly through the invigorating air, glorious to have the drowsily wakening world to one's self amid the lifting mists of the dawning day; glorious to have youth, friends, laughter! Work was made for slaves! Was there an appointment of some sort? Forget it. Finish the spree, eh!

Old Christian is cross when he pokes his night-capped head from the second-story window. Early roisterers who drag him out of bed for fifty cents' worth of drink are the bane of Christian's life! But these are two gentlemen. Oh! It is Mr. Tommy and Mr. Billy; and they represent that solvent of all sorrows, money! The gentlemen want sausage and eggs. Old Christian removes his funny scarlet nightcap, and comes right down. Billy and Tommy go into the billiard room while they wait, and old Christian

brings them an appetizer, some of his best imported schnaps. Finish the spree, eh! The Demon Rum chortles.

They play billiards, and every awkward shot is a cause of merriment. There is still laughter in the world, except for one fixed idea. Billy's notions are in a haze; as, for instance, he is just about to try, for the fourth time, to hit his cue ball, when suddenly he finds himself seated at the breakfast table, with a compote of delicious looking fruit before him. Outside the sun rides in the misty sky, a huge red ball; the bare trees interlace their branches against the background of the glistening river. Rather raw the air is. Watch out! They skid dangerously near the ditch that time. The chauffeur has had a drink or two, to warm him. Oh yes, they are in the machine again. Did Billy taste his fruit? He doesn't remember, and he has no memory at all of the sausage and eggs, though he detects the taste of coffee in his mouth.

Why, here's a village! There's a saloon with a door wide open, and an Italian in a faded blue blouse is scrubbing the floor. The Demon Rum howls for a drink!

Blankness; total blankness; there is a confused jumble of motion, of changing from place to place,

of taking a drink. Occasionally there is the voice of Tommy, steady, solid, unwavering. Tommy is singing the ditty to the Demon Rum. He is giving a lecture on astronomy. There is a fight somewhere. Was Billy in the fight, or only a witness? He is not sure. It was such a long, long time ago!

Scenes shift strangely, too; now country, now village, now city; now on foot, now in the machine, now on Fifth Avenue, now in the club; but always with that one fixed idea. Finish the spree, eh! Now Billy is alone, except for the Demon Rum. Billy has had to sneak away from Tommy, because some instinct tells him that Tommy lacks the pertinacity to take this little excursion. Billy will go back to the club and find Tommy when he is through his errand.

Hello, Billy is here! Where is here? His eyes are puffed nearly shut, and they hurt when he opens them to look around. His eyes are tired. Billy himself is tired! His own voice sounds strange and far-off to him, and shrill, as he asks his sleepy chauffeur a question. Oh, yes, they're out in the suburbs, and the lamps gleam again in the dusk, and this is a familiar house. Benning's. Why did Billy come here? Oh yes, he has to

show himself to Geraldine, now that he has finished his spree!

He does. He exhibits his finished spree to her just one brief instant before the door slams; and out of the puffed and inflamed countenance of poor Billy the Demon Rum leers his red leer and snarls his red snarl!

CHAPTER V

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF BOW-WOW

THIN bands as of steel were about the throat of Martin Burke, and, strong man though he was, he could not turn, nor break the grip of those maniacal fingers! With the cunning of frenzy, the white-haired madman had drawn back Burke's head so that he could only wave his arms helplessly, while above him bent that distorted face with the glaring red eyes! Burke's own eyes were distended, his breath was stopped, and his face was purpling, when the door was thrown open and Nora Maloney, as big and as broad and as strong as the grandfather who had led the Fenians, came dashing in, with a huge hand ready for the fray. In one more minute, Bow-Wow, his fever of strength all spent, was lying flat on the floor, and the Widow Maloney, her thick ankles sticking straight before her, was sitting on him, the ruddy glow of the fire and the ruddy light of the dawn blending with the ruddy flush of her face.

"Your life belongs to me, Martin Burke," she puffed, twisting her fallen hair into a scraggly knot. "I think I saved it for you."

"You did that," assented Martin grudgingly, for he had his suspicions of the Widow Maloney's intentions regarding him. "I take it as a gift, but I can never repay you; so it would be no use to try." He was feeling of his throat.

"Well, there's always ways," considered janitress Nora, and cast up at the stalwart fellow a glance and a smile of great friendliness.

"Where's my needle?" growled Burke, wisely changing the subject and searching the floor.

He found the hypodermic beneath the couch, and then, as methodically as if nothing had happened, he prepared his solution, and filled his needle, and gave Bow-Wow the injection.

"A case of the jerries," guessed Mrs. Maloney, as Martin gallantly helped her to her feet. "It's many's the time I handled Andy Maloney when he had the jerries. The best way I found was to clout him behind the ear with a stick of stove wood."

"It's a favorite domestic method," drily commented Burke. "I don't think this is a regular case of the tremens just yet," he went on, studying the now quiet Bow-Wow. The man had not suc-

cumbed to the drug, but he was weak from over-exertion. "He'll have the sure-enough jim-jams in about two days; but if I have him sober enough, in between, to answer questions for the boss, I'll be very well satisfied." He picked up Bow-Wow and carried him to the bed, as if the man were a child.

"Shall I sit with you?" offered Nora, out of the goodness of her heart.

"You shall not," refused Burke promptly. It was in his nature to blarney Mrs. Maloney, but it was in his wisdom not to. So, all by himself, he remained at Bow-Wow's bedside until the stupor of the drug had set in; then he lay down on the couch in the lounging-room for a nap. The man was safe for a few hours. No Billy as yet.

No Billy when Burke awoke, with the bright sun streaming in at the windows of the lounging-room, and with Nora Maloney shaking him by the shoulders.

"The saints be thanked!" said Nora, as he opened his eyes. "I thought for a while that you'd shot the drug into the wrong man, for I've been ringing your bell and pounding on your door this past hour."

"That's kind of you, Mrs. Maloney," returned

Burke. Rubbing his eyes, and springing up, he went to the door of Billy's room. Empty!

With a frown of worry, he visited Bow-Wow. The tramp was lying wide awake, but there was no delirium in his eyes. He was too weak, however, to rise.

"The top of the morning to you, Pop," greeted Burke cheerfully. "How's your appetite?"

"Water!" moaned Bow-Wow.

"Never mind, Old Sport, we'll have you out and well chirked up in less than no time. If I've time to-day I'll give you a hair cut, and we'll trim your chinchillas."

He hustled out to the pantry, and into the man's glass of water he poured something from his stock of rough medicines. He hesitated before he prepared this dose. It would strengthen and clear the patient for a day, but the relapse would be serious. "Anyway," decided Burke, as a sop to his own conscience, "the man couldn't escape the jerries sooner or later, and he's in good hands."

"Shall I stay and help you?" offered Mrs. Maloney, looking the cherry comforter which she was willing to be.

"You shall not," refused Burke emphatically, and, taking no offense, Nora left him alone.

There is always time until eternity comes to an end.

That was a busy day for Burke, but he was glad that it was. It kept him from worry. There were a dozen telephone calls for Billy; and Joe Mullen, the superintendent of the Pannard Building, quit the day angry. He had called off his men.. There was nothing he could do until he knew what to do; and where, in the name of all the hottest places Joe could mention, was Billy! Why didn't he tend to business! He wasn't at his office, he wasn't at his club, he wasn't at his home! Burke nearly fought Joe Mullen. If he could have reached through the telephone he would have done so. It would have been a great relief to him.

Bow-Wow, in a worried day like this, was a godsend. Artificially strengthened and sobered by Burke's guileful aid, he submitted to all the strenuous things which were done to him, even to a hair-cutting and a beard-trimming and a manicuring. At five o'clock, Burke, planning Billy's possible dinner, came in and looked at Bow-Wow critically; then a sudden humorous idea seized him, and he went to his own wardrobe, where hung some of Billy's and Tommy Tinkle's discarded clothing.

"Back yourself into these, Pop," he directed, and went away laughing.

Half an hour later, he returned with a carefully measured drink. It was time Bow-Wow had a little whisky, if he was to be kept in strength and sanity for Billy.

"Here's your liquor, Pop," he sang cheerily, as he came through the hall.

At the door he stopped, stricken dumb, and he almost dropped the glass! Before him was a tall, spare, straight, elderly gentleman, with waving white hair and a neatly cropped silver Vandyke. He was in evening clothes, and his white bow tie was quite properly made. He stood by the window, looking calmly out at the street lamps as they sprang, in the dusk, into huge tinted pearls. He was smoking one of Billy's cigarettes.

"I thought you might like a little drink, Mr. Doe," stammered the man who had wrought this miracle in Bow-Wow.

"Thank you, Burke." The voice was low, and still a trifle husky, but it had in it a modulation which Bow-Wow had lost. He took the glass, with a hand the temporary firmness of which gave Burke's conscience another jab, and he looked into the depths of the oily liquid thoughtfully for a moment. "I suppose I need this," he considered

slowly, as if he were debating whether to cast it aside. He drank it, but with a shudder. The drugs with which Burke had plied him, and with which he was stimulated and upheld, had made liquor more or less nauseating. He reached for a carafe of water, and, with an effort, poured himself a drink, while Burke watched him in fascination.

No, Burke had not wrought this miracle. He had only supplied the setting, that discarded dress suit. At first he had wondered whether his sudden deference was a tribute to the man or the dress suit. Now he saw it was the man. He had expected to find Bow-Wow sheepishly surveying himself in these, to him, ludicrous garments. Instead, he found John Doe wearing them with grateful enjoyment, and as no man could wear them without years of habit.

“Anything else, sir?”

“Nothing just now, thank you.” A calm, even tone, one used to simple command.

Burke went in and aired the blue room!

Left to himself, John Doe relaxed a trifle of the straightness of his shoulders and the erectness of his carriage. It had been an effort to fill his formal garments so smoothly before Burke, but the exertion had been good for him. It had helped to bring him nearer to that person whom he

had been before he had become Bow-Wow of the Bowery. He walked over to the mirror, and gazed with earnest inquiry into that worn and abused countenance, as if striving to trace in it something which he vaguely remembered from long ago.

It was of no use, and, restless and distressed, he wandered about the rooms. The chemical counteractant which Burke had put against his years of alcoholic stupor had only restored to him, from that old life, the things which had been of automatic habit. It had not cleared his numbed mind of its paralysis.

In the library he found something at last which chained his attention; a drawing-table near the window. On the board was tacked a half finished working plan, composed of many strange angling lines. They seemed to have no particular form or completion, and to the eye of one unskilled in iron-work they would have little meaning; yet John Doe seemed held by them. He returned to the board again and again, and each time his brows knotted. Two or three minutes of this was all he could stand at one attempt. The effort was as weakening as it would have been for him to carry coal. Those lines, in their logical relation to each other, meant something; and deep

within John Doe there stirred an impulse, an awakening, a desire which he could not fathom.

He laid hold of the T square, and moved it up and down; he held its head firmly against the edge of the board, so that the blade, as it moved, was kept perfectly at right angles to the drawing. Only an experienced draughtsman acquires that knack. He picked up a pencil with a long, hard, sharp point, and drew a faint line along the bottom of the paper. He had seemed, to himself, to be doing this out of curiosity; but the line was even with the edge of the T square blade along its full length. An inexperienced draughtsman tilts his pencil backward as he draws such a line, so that it varies from a true right angle in a long imperceptible parabola.

John Doe sat down and buried his head in his hands. Burke glanced in at him and then passed the door, but the guest sat perfectly motionless. This man was searching earnestly for his mind, for his memory, for a long-forgotten world, in which there were ambitions, and joys, and achievements worth while! No struggle for the regaining of a lost soul was ever more pathetic than this terrible battle for a lost mentality. The records graven by memory on the intricate convolutions of the brain are never entirely effaced except

by death; and be they good deeds or be they bad, those deeds stalk from their hidden recesses of the scroll to confront us at the most unexpected moments. They may be blurred, they may be clogged with the dust of neglect, and faint from the rust of disuse, but they are there like lines incised in marble, to be deciphered when the surface is cleared.

So it was that John Doe, sitting in the big library chair, peered and peered into the dark places of his long-forsaken mind, until, at a sudden turn, he found two names: Jean! Tavy! It was then that he raised up and gave a great cry of anguish, and fell to the floor.

He was Bow-Wow again when Burke brought him to, and he had forgotten the fragments which John Doe had remembered; but, later, he sat up at his lonely dinner like John Doe. Afterwards, in the lounging-room, with his coffee and one of Billy's cigars, he was stronger than Burke had yet seen him.

"Why am I here?" he unexpectedly asked.

"I couldn't say, sir," replied Burke, speculating on that false strength; wondering how long it would continue. "Mr. Lane brought you home last night, and told me to take care of you until he came back."

"Who is Mr. Lane?"

"An engineering architect, sir. He makes a speciality of large structural work. He's quite a young man; and fine! You'll see him this evening, I hope."

John Doe nodded his head, and gazed through the window at the long perspective of lights. Out there was the world, an unpleasant world. He preferred infinitely to be here. He had Mike Dowd's Sink in his memory, but that seemed a long way off, and incredible. He wandered once to the door of the library and looked in, but he shook his head and came away. That room was full of wearisome problems, problems which he meant to solve; but just now he would wait. He must have more strength.

Burke had quietly left the room. He was intensely worried by this time. Billy had been gone over twenty-four hours! He brought in a glass of whisky.

"I'll just set this on the table, sir," he remarked. "You may want it by and by," and he placed beside it a siphon of seltzer and a glass.

John Doe reached forward mechanically, but, midway of the movement, he stopped and let his hand rest on the table. He looked at the whisky long and hard, and drew his hand away. There

was his enemy! He had always known that, but he could not remember the time when he had offered any resistance to it. That was the thing which had raised a veil of sodden vapor between him and all the good things which he now strove to recall. No foe lurking in grass, knife between teeth, could be more vicious than this; no noxious snake could be more deadly; and yet there grew up in him a sudden wild craving for it! It seemed a thing of life, as it gleamed there yellow in its glass; it seemed to taunt and mock him; it seemed to boast that, within a few minutes, its deadening fumes would be seeping upward into his brain, and obliterating again all those dimly incised lines which he was now striving so hard to decipher! What was it that he had remembered just before dinner? Unconsciously, as he concentrated, he reached out for the glass of whisky. His fingers touched the cold surface, and he hastily drew back his hand.

God! He must have it! There was a devil in him that cried out for it. There was not a fiber in him which did not crave it! It was life! Suddenly, with an inarticulate gasp, he clutched the glass! He was trembling in every nerve as he raised it towards his lips.

At that moment the door opened, and there

walked in Tommy Tinkle, half supporting and half dragging Billy Lane. Tommy, with his silk hat on the back of his head and that perpetual grin on his lips, helped his friend into a chair, where Billy sprawled, his arms dangling and his chin on his breast. His mouth was half open, and he was breathing heavily.

Tommy bowed gravely to the stranger, who still stood with his glass in his hand.

"The same to you and many of 'em," he observed cheerfully. "Drink hearty and have another."

Burke came running in, and, paying no attention to either Tommy or John Doe, stooped and began taking off Billy's shoes.

"Whisky again, sir," he said, looking up at Tommy reproachfully.

There was a sudden crash of glass, and the sudden upleaping of flame. John Doe had thrown his whisky in the fireplace.

CHAPTER VI

A FAMILY AFFAIR

GERALDINE BENNING was furious — and something more! At dinner her eyes were red.

“I am tremendously disappointed in Billy,” observed the plump and placid Mrs. Benning. Her round, smooth face was as clear of texture as Geraldine’s, and her eyes were as large. “He has always been such a nice boy.”

“He never could have been nice!” snapped Geraldine. “He only seemed nice! If he had been, he couldn’t have done what he did!”

“That sounds true, Geraldine, but it isn’t quite,” judged her father. “Of course it was an unpardonable thing to do — but ——”

“But he did it!” interrupted Geraldine savagely.

Her father thoughtfully poured himself a glass of wine. He was a pink-faced man, and the very personification of good nature; but thoughtfulness

became him. He was so conscientious about it.

"I'm worried over Billy," he resumed. "He seems to have gradually increased his drinking, and he's not the right temperament for it. That was why I wanted to keep him here this morning. You made a mistake, Geraldine."

"Billy and Tommy should have respected Geraldine enough not to have come, in their condition," remarked Mrs. Benning, and her eyelids began to redden. It gave her a trace of glitter. "I am no friend to whisky."

Three-B Benning's neck crimsoned. He took his three nips a day, and it seemed to agree with him. He had never in his life been intoxicated.

"You are right, my dear," acknowledged the head of the house, passing hastily from that suggested topic. "The boys should not have come here in their condition, but they did not realize that they were in that condition, and I know, and you know, and Geraldine knows, that they positively meant no disrespect to her." Geraldine interrupted with a sniff, but her father went straight on, in spite of all his uncomfortable experiences. "They only meant to give Geraldine a pleasant morning ride. I saw them myself. When they came they were in a happy mood."

"I suppose you think I should have gone with them!" Geraldine's cheeks were blazing.

"Intoxicated as they were!" supplemented Mrs. Benning, fanning herself violently.

"Certainly not!" and Three-B Benning's voice lowered one degree toward his best bass range. He felt that he was being put wrong, and he held himself in. "I would have been the first to forbid Geraldine's taking that ride. However, as I said before, the boys were in a happy mood. I asked them to breakfast with me. I could have handled them, and sent Billy to his very important work."

"He should have remembered that himself!"

"Geraldine had a good natured man to deal with. She antagonized him with a flare of temper, and made him stubborn. She advised him to go get as drunk as he could. And he did it."

"Why, you're actually blaming me for the whole disgraceful thing!" Geraldine's indignation was almost hysterical.

"Why, Puss!" remonstrated her father, shocked, and his tone was all tenderness. "You know better than that. You are young, and inexperienced in everything relating to the world's greatest tragedy. If Billy were not so well worth saving, I would not be so serious about our responsibility of this morning. Billy has too bril-

liant a future to throw away. He's a fine boy. He has almost grown up in this house. He is like a son to me."

"I think a wife might keep Billy straight." This sage observation came from Mrs. Benning, who gave herself great credit that Three B. had become the nice man he was.

"It is a dangerous thing for any girl to try," said Benning, shaking his head thoughtfully and sipping at his wine.

Geraldine compressed her red lips.

"If she were severe enough with him, he could soon be controlled," she declared with wise speculation; and then her father laughed at her. To his profound astonishment, she jumped from her chair and hurried to her room, with her handkerchief to her eyes. She retired early that night, but she went to sleep late. Had she been in any degree to blame for Billy's conduct between his two visits? And why hadn't Tommy come back? Somehow, no one had worried about Tommy. There had not seemed to be an impression that Tommy was in any danger.

By morning Geraldine had settled into cold anger. At ten o'clock there came a box of gorgeous American Beauties. She knew that, since they were from Billy's florist, they must be from Billy;

but she opened them to make sure. Stunning roses they were, each one perfect, sweet, and it seemed a shame that their beauty should be connected with such thoughts as she now associated with Billy. She buried her face among the cool leaves and inhaled their wonderful fragrance. Because she was angry with Billy was no reason she should not do this. The flowers couldn't help it. Carefully she tied up the box again, with her own hands, and sent the roses back! There had been a note, an apology, no doubt; but there are some things for which no apologies can make amends!

Tommy's flowers came by and by. She sent them back unopened. She loved flowers!

At one o'clock there arrived a package of her favorite candy; but she returned that without a qualm. The candy was not alive like the roses.

She had intended to go out that afternoon, but she changed her mind. She might as well settle this once for all. She went up to her room and selected her prettiest tea-gown, the one with the pale blue fur, and in her golden brown hair she wound a string of turquoise beads. Sorrow had not yet dimmed her eyes nor faded the bloom in her cheeks.

At three o'clock Billy came; and that was the moment of her deadliest disdain. She was not at

home! When Billy looked up at her boudoir window she was sitting there calmly reading, and, most subtle touch of all, by her side stood a vase of great, flaming American Beauties!

There were six telephone calls for her between that and eight o'clock, but she answered none of them. She was distinctly and decidedly not at home! Nor was she at home when Tommy Tinkle called at eight-fifteen.

Another morning. She was coldly indifferent now. She had buried the past, and looked forward to a new life; a Billyless and Tommyless life, and consequently a serene one. Both letters she had re-enclosed, unopened, of course; but, other than that, the boys were entirely out of her mind.

Again she remained at home in the afternoon, but if she had expected to be annoyed by further pursuit, she was mistaken, for no one called, except Count Tommassio Tinklario, who came with a letter of introduction from Nellie Sayers, then in Washington.

Excited and wondering, Geraldine dressed herself in her new white velvet with the quaint ermine collar and sash, and, fair and warmly tinted, went down to receive the Italian nobleman.

He wore the correct black mustache, and was standing by the window when she entered the recep-

tion parlor. He was a rather squarely built gentleman, even in his trimly fitted cutaway. As she advanced to meet him, he came swiftly over to her with both hands outstretched, and said:

“Hello, Geraldine.”

Thereupon the Italian nobleman removed his black mustache with a flourish, and grinned in delight.

“Tommy Tinkle!” gasped Geraldine. “Of all the idiotic . . .”

She suddenly remembered that part of her furious anger with Billy was directed at Tommy. “This is unpardonable,” she coldly told him, and turning, she sailed majestically for the door.

“No you don’t!” laughed Tommy, and intercepted her. “You don’t know what a dickens of a time I’ve had to break in here. I had to stand over the engraver to get just that single card; and I tore up a dozen letters before I could write one which looked enough like sister Nellie’s. Say, what do you think of the mustache? Look!” and he put it on upside down. “Doesn’t make much difference how you wear it, you know. It’s almost the same either way,” and he changed it, to show her.

Of course she laughed; but that did not mean that she had lessened her anger. It only made the

earnestness of her determination more difficult to display. She started to sweep past him; but shucks! he went with her; even took her arm, in fact.

"I don't blame you for never speaking to Billy again," he cheerfully informed her; "but you can't hold anything against me, because I apologize."

"It's just like one of your ghastly practical jokes to have sent Billy back here that night!" she hotly charged him, and she did not see the little twitch in Tommy's humorous countenance. "It was all your fault! Billy is always with you when things happen! You have a bad influence on him!"

"Then why do you blame Billy?" triumphantly argued Tommy, and he grinned. "Poor Billy's all broke up about it, Geraldine."

"It serves him right!" she retorted. "He should be!"

"Well, it wasn't really his fault," Tommy told her, and led her towards the library. "I thought it would be a great joke, but nobody else seemed to have any sense of humor."

"It's no credit to Billy that he's weak enough to let you lead him into mischief!"

"I give up!" announced Tommy despondently. "I came to do my best for Billy, but I see it's no use! I'll tell him we're not to be forgiven, and we

are not to bother you again!" He was very sorrowful as they turned in at the library door. "I will not even bother you again with Billy's apologies!" They rounded the corner of the palm screen. "Why, hello, Billy! What are you doing here?"

There he stood, right in front of her, tall and straight and handsome, but red with shame. He tried to say something, but humiliation tied his tongue, and Geraldine, without knowing just why, held out her hands to him. He took them both, and down into her brown eyes gazed all his contrite apologies.

Good old Tommy Tinkle!

CHAPTER VII

IT IS NOT GOOD TO FORGET

JEAN! Tavy! Those were the two words which were oftenest upon the lips of John Doe, in the long days of delirium following his sudden stoppage of the poison with which, for years, he had drenched himself; and those were the two words which remained with him after the days of delirium were past. However, when he had come to full consciousness, those words were never on his tongue. He merely lay for silent hours, and thought about them; and with each day of thought the sadness grew deeper upon his countenance.

Not that he dwelt upon this alone. There were many other things to occupy his mind, by turns. In his desperate illness he had come up through a long, dark tunnel, but there had been light at the end; and he had reached the light! He understood now, for example, the exact meaning of those queerly angling lines on Billy's drawing board, and when, weak and emaciated, he rose from his bed in the blue room, supported on the strong arm of

Burke, his first journey was to that board. He spread his arms over it, as if it were a thing of life that he loved, and he bent down his head. When he raised, his eyes were moist. The bleariness had gone from them now. They were clear, and dark gray, and there was a dignity in them which had grown as his sadness had grown.

Billy, bounding in from his work, at dinner-time, found Doe at the drawing-board engaged in contemplative study.

"Well, well!" exclaimed the young man in delight. "Burke told me you'd be up to-day, but I didn't expect to find you working."

"I don't believe I can stay away from it for long," returned Doe with a smile. His lips had begun to have form. "How are you coming on with the Pannard foundation?" This had been his first question every night during his convalescence.

"Great!" Billy picked up a decanter from the library table and poured himself a drink. "We are through with the test borings, and have discovered that your diagnosis was correct to the most minute detail."

Doe tapped on the drawing-board with his pencil, sliding it through and through his fingers; point, heel; point, heel.

"Billy, I don't care much for the truss you are using over this assembly room," and he turned with concern to the drawing.

"It's the best type known for the purpose," stated Billy, edging up to the board and studying the drawing critically. "As you see, I have not much height to spare, and there is no construction for spanning a wide space so good as the Stuart truss."

John Doe stopped for only a second in the twirling of his pencil, and in that second his lips compressed; then he went on sliding his fingers down over the pencil and turning it; point, heel; point, heel.

"The Stuart truss," he repeated, and then he was quiet for a moment longer. He roused himself with a slight jerk of his head and shoulders. "That truss was designed for a specific purpose, but it was not intended to cover cases where the support for the thrust required such heavy construction. Look here." He drew a sketch-pad toward him, and made a few swift strokes with his pencil. "Don't you think that this principle, with some modification perhaps, will suit your needs better?"

Billy took the sketch, and, as he studied it, his eyes sparkled, and then narrowed. He laid down the paper without comment, and went to the win-

dow, looking out at the sky above the adjoining buildings. Suddenly he wheeled. "Mr. Doe, what are your future plans?"

Doe smiled.

"I have none. How could I have? Remember, I am just born."

"Welcome to the world!" laughed Billy. "How would you like to come in with me?"

The tears sprang into the older man's eyes.

"You don't know me," he reminded Billy.

"You're John Doe. Whatever or whomever you may have been before I named you, is no concern of mine. I know this much. You can help me. I'm a good, solid plugger, but I am brilliant enough to realize that I haven't creative genius. You have. I need it in my business." He turned to the sketch again.

John Doe was silent, though he tried to speak. He held out his hand instead.

"Then it's agreed!" declared Billy, looking hastily away from the man's eyes; but he shook hands heartily. "From now on, it's John and Billy."

Burke appeared in the doorway and smiled broadly at the tableau.

"Shall you dress for dinner, sir?" he inquired.

"It depends on John," returned Billy. "If

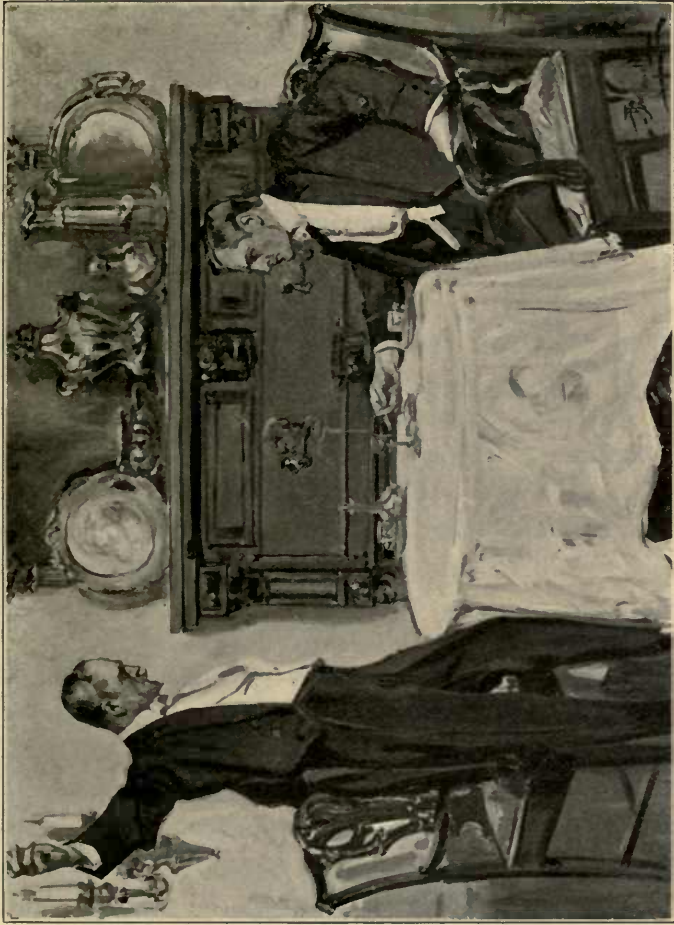
he's going back to bed I think I'll make a quick ceremony of it, and sit with him a while."

"I should prefer to dress," considered John. "I've been in bed so long."

At dinner there was another change in Lane's attitude toward the man who had been Bow-Wow; and the change was like Burke's had been. So far he had only seen him in the frowsy habiliments of a tramp, and in robe and slippers. He was a different person in formal garb, and once more Billy pondered curiously on the man's past. He had been a gentleman, at least. That much was certain. How had he fallen so low? And by what strange fate had Billy found him? And where was it all to lead? To bigger business!

The kindliness of the young architect came out at dinner. He had discovered that too long an effort at concentration both wearied and confused Doe, who was not yet quite clear; so Billy chatted away about everything under the sun. Over their coffee and cigars in the lounging-room, he returned to business. For the time being he left the discussion of terms in the background, but he laid before Doe all his plans and projects and prospects; and the older man listened with grave attention.

Suddenly, however, in the very midst of this



Suddenly John Doe stood up. "Billy"—in his voice was anguish—"My wife! My little girl! I want them!"

quiet talk, Doe stood up and stretched forth his clenched fists.

“Billy!” There was in his voice that anguish which, in the cries of men or beasts, has started the springs of sympathy since the world began. “My wife! My little girl! I want them!” His features were working convulsively, and Lane sprang to his side, in fear that he might fall. Doe shook his head. He was strong enough now. He had new strength. He forced himself to sit down. “I want you to find them for me. I haven’t seen them for fifteen years. My little Tavy should be a young woman.” He paused a moment while he tried to picture her. “And Jean — is she living or dead? I must know! It is a torture to me through every hour of the long nights!”

“We’ll find them for you.” Billy tried to speak with his usual hearty assurance, but there was a curious break in his voice, and he felt a queer numbness in his cheeks. This was the first time he had been quite near to any big emotion, and all life, in that moment, seemed to be full of the imminence of unexpected misery. “Where did you leave them?”

“In Willowwood, but they moved away from

there shortly after I disappeared. That was while I still remembered things. Afterwards, I — I forgot. It was hard work at first; but I forgot."

The young man gazed steadily into the fire. He was listening intently, but he felt that he must not interrupt. There was a short silence, in which John Doe struggled with himself. Humiliation had been a possibility long absent from Bow-Wow, but it had come back as a benign gift to John Doe.

"I had an enemy, Billy," he finally said, and he glanced toward the decanter. "It — it got me! I neglected my business. I neglected my family. I broke promise after promise. I was expelled from my clubs, but, through it all, with the losses of position, money, honor, manhood, self-respect, I clung to one thing as if it were more precious than all the priceless treasures of the world; whisky! I made a god of it! I devoted my days and nights to it; then weeks, then months.

"One day, after a prolonged spree, I had a lucid hour. In that hour I converted every security I had into cash, and banked it in my wife's name. Then I sent her a note that I was dead; and I died."

There was a long silence.

"But you have come back to life," Billy pres-

ently reminded him, returning slowly from his contemplation of this deep tragedy.

"No," denied the low voice of the man who had come back from Hades with silvered hair and emaciated body and torn heart; "John Doe came to life, thanks to your goodness; but the grave still holds Harrison Stuart."

"My God!" Billy could not have been more astounded if the tomb had suddenly yawned to set this man before him. "Not the Harrison Stuart who built the old Palace of Commerce, the first important structural iron edifice in America! Not the Harrison Stuart, of 'Stuart on Trusses,' 'Stuart on Bridges,' 'Stuart on Stresses and Strains'! Why, man, I've used those authorities as my professional ten commandments!" Billy's eyes were glowing. He was boyishly excited. He rose and paced the floor. Suddenly he laughed. "Why, Mr. Stuart, on the very night I met you, Joe Mullen said that he wished Harrison Stuart were alive! And I was touching elbows with you at the time! You must have heard it! Is that why you spoke to me about the Pannard foundation?"

The dean of the engineering architects knotted his brow painfully.

"I don't know," he pondered. "I don't re-

member. I don't think so. Oh, I wish I could forget all that hideous nightmare!" A second later he brought his fist down on the arm of his chair. "No!" he vehemently declared. "I must not forget! It is not good for a man to forget anything that he has done! He needs it for the correction of his heart and for the life of his very soul! I wish never again to forget."

"And, by George, I'm to have Harrison Stuart for a partner!" Billy, walking the floor, could not free his mind from the marvelous fact. "Stuart, the first thing to do is to locate your family. If you left them fairly well-to-do, they should be easily traced, and we'll not attempt to do anything in a business way until you have been reunited with them."

"No!" The explosive refusal was wrung from Harrison Stuart as if it had brought a piece of his heart with it. "I don't dare! I can only hope to know that they are safe! So long as I must look on that decanter with fear, I must remain John Doe; to them, to you, to the world — to myself!"

CHAPTER VIII

BILLY AND THE IMPS

THREE blocks from the Bowery, three blocks from the corner of Mike Dowd's Sink, and quite visible through the narrow slit of the alley, is Vanheuster Square, where once the stolid burghers sat, of pleasant evenings, and smoked their long clay pipes, and commented in wide-mouthed gruffness on the invasion of the verdamp't English, who had come to disturb the peace and order of New Amsterdam. There still remain portions of the squat little foundation and of two of the stone benches which were once the municipal glory of that old Dutch town; and the surface of the ground, in one corner, is still ridged and hard from the roots of the sturdy elm which once reared its branches above the tops of the highest buildings in old New York.

Traces of its staid old respectability still linger in Vanheuster Square, as if the spirit of old Dynk Vanheuster still hovered austere-ly over it, to protect it from the squalor of all those strange black-

eyed aliens who surround it on every side. Here the old tenements, though sunk in poverty, stand stiff and prim, as if they had defied time and decay; here there are green shutters to all the windows, and hard little flights of stone steps lead down from every door; here the children after school wear clean white waists or clean white pinafores, as they play in the graveled square, which, with its four clumps of starved grass, is their substitute for the country; and here Billy Lane's search led him, after busy days among the false Stuarts of the telephone book and the city directory and the tax records. The police department, applied to with some misgiving, had been Billy's last resort, and that inquiry had sifted down, after some fruitless calls, to Officer Dillon, big and pigeon-chested and puff-cheeked, who knew vaguely of a Mrs. Harrison Stuart on his beat.

At the primmest and stiffest of the Vanheuster Square tenements, the house with the greenest shutters and the hardest stone steps, Billy Lane stopped, on an afternoon when the air was soft and the sun shone brightly, and one optimistic robin sat on the stunted fir tree, shivering, but trying to pretend that it was Spring.

There were no electric bells or speaking tubes in this dark, narrow hall. Those things are not for

the poor. One simply climbed the deeply worn steps of the wooden stairs, flight after flight, until one found the right door; and it was by this process that Billy Lane located the apartments of Mrs. Harrison Stuart. He knocked, and presently the door was opened. For an instant, the usually self-possessed Billy was startled into tongue-tied awkwardness. There stood before him the most beautiful girl he had ever seen!

She was small and slight, and exquisitely molded. But it was her face which held his gaze, even to the point of unconscious rudeness. Her oval cheeks were pale, but her skin was of a glorious transparency, and beneath its surface was a warm tint so delicate that it was like the faint trace of pink in the heart of a white rose. Upon her head was a wealth of raven black hair, which rippled and waved and curled as if it possessed an independent will of its own. It was bound, just now, with a shell-pink ribbon, but wherever a curl had a wayward notion it had shot itself loose, to cast its lustrous ringlets about that perfect face. It was the eyes, however, which caught and held Billy, spell-bound! They were large, luminous — and what color? Dark gray? Brown? No; violet! Or were they a deep, evasive blue?

The girl smiled at his hesitation, and, as her

delicately chiselled lips curved, those remarkable eyes sparkled, and a certain trace of impishness seemed to flit, for a moment, upon her countenance. Even the daintily formed nose and the piquant chin and the broad, smooth forehead seemed to share in the flash of merriment, and the countless wayward curls of jet fairly twinkled.

"Tavy!" called a voice from within an adjoining room.

"Yes, mother." The voice on those syllables was of wonderfully sweet modulation. "I am at the door."

"Oh." The inner voice was nearer.

"Is — does Mrs. Harrison Stuart live here?" stammered Billy, feeling remarkably big and clumsy.

Still a twinkle in the big eyes. They were violet!

"Yes."

"May I ask if it is the Mrs. Harrison Stuart whose husband was the famous engineering architect?"

"Yes." The twinkle had gone from the luminous eyes. They were regarding him steadily. They were dark gray!

A second figure came to the door and appeared beside the girl. It was a woman in whose face

was that sweetness which can only come through bravely endured suffering. She said nothing. She only looked at the caller eagerly, and there seemed a half hope, a half fear in her. She seemed almost to tremble.

"Thank you. May I come in and talk with you?" This to the gray-haired woman; and it was she who opened the door wider for him to enter.

Billy Lane took a hasty survey of the room as he stepped in. It was large, a grace which it owed to its age; and it was very simply furnished, though there were such evidences of neatness and dainty cleanliness, and of such homelike occupancy, that it seemed a very comfortable room indeed. There were three incongruities, however. In one corner was a mahogany drawing-case, exquisitely carved and with gold knobs to the drawers. There was a gold inscription plate on it, showing that it had been some stately gift; and its cost would have bought, many times over, the entire poor furnishings of Mrs. Harrison Stuart's three-room apartment. On the mantel, amid such modest bric-à-brac as people in most humble circumstances might afford, stood a richly chased gold frame, in which was the portrait of a man in his prime, a man with a strong, forceful face and dark

gray eyes. Could John Doe have looked like that — or could Bow-Wow!

The other incongruity was a long table over by the windows, on which was a small embroidery loom, a tray filled with many little compartments full of assorted beads, a water-color box surrounded by half-painted place cards set up to dry, and a perfect kaleidoscope of bright colored bits of silk. On the table, too, were several fantastic dolls, all of them in the same queer stage of semi-completion; elaborate court costumes from the waists down, and chiefly stuffedness and baldheadedness from the waist up. Yet, with all this confusion of purpose and means, there was neatness and dainty cleanliness, even here.

“Won’t you sit down?” invited Mrs. Stuart, who had subjected the young man to the same rigid inspection he had given their work table.

Billy felt guilty of rudeness, but he found instant justification. He had a report to make, and he would be asked an infinity of questions at home. He hoped to be able to answer some of the most likely ones.

“My name is Billy Lane,” he began, conscious that the dark gray eyes were sparkling with the prim formality of this opening. Or were they violet now? He withheld himself from looking. “I

am an engineering architect. I was an ardent student of your husband's books."

"Yes?" The hands of Mrs. Stuart held a piece of the bright colored silk; evidently the jacket of one of the fine court ladies on the table; but her long, thin fingers locked through the silk as she bent forward eagerly.

"Mr. Stuart died some fifteen years ago, I believe."

There was an instant unlocking of the long, thin fingers, and, for a moment, they fluttered, then re-locked, and a light leaped into the patient blue eyes.

"Yes." Still bent eagerly forward.

Billy felt the dark gray eyes of the girl studying him seriously now, and he was more at ease. He even glanced at them. By George, they were brown! Or was that the reflection from the pink dress? It was a neat little dress, a daintily checked gingham, plain and trim fitting, but most advantageous to a girl with such an exquisite little figure, and such a glorious complexion, and such waywardly curly black hair, and such wonderful eyes! Where was he in the conversation? Oh.

"I understand that Mr. Stuart left the uncompleted manuscript of a work on roofs and towers."

"Yes." The light of never-dying hope faded

once more from the patient blue eyes. No news of him! The long, thin fingers unlocked, and took up the tiny silk jacket.

“A personal need for authoritative information on that subject has given me an interest in this matter, and it had occurred to me that Mr. Stuart’s manuscript might be in such shape as to make its publication possible. It should be of considerable financial value to you. Also, it would be of vast benefit to students of structural iron work. Harrison Stuart,” and here he included both mother and daughter in his genuine enthusiasm, “was so far ahead of his time that they haven’t caught up with him yet!”

A bright smile rewarded him for the tribute. It was a friendly smile, in which there was no impishness, a smile of delicately curving red lips, of pearly teeth, of flashing dimples, of twinkling black curls, of large, luminous eyes; dark blue!

“I scarcely think it possible.” Mrs. Stuart examined the tiny silk jacket critically. There was a threaded needle sticking in it. She drew out the needle and took a stitch or two. “Mr. Stuart’s former publishers, shortly after his death,” a slight hesitation before that word, “examined the manuscript, and they pronounced it too incomplete for publication.”

"I had an impression that such was the case, Mrs. Stuart," Billy went on, most uncomfortably. He felt, somehow, like a traitor, in the presence of these women, knowing what he did. He had only to say one sentence to bring such happiness into this room as it had not known for years! He had a terrific impulse to say it, an impulse so strong that it frightened him. "It occurs to me, however, that we might have some competent person complete the work," he hastily concluded.

Mrs. Stuart sewed up the rest of the seam. The girl walked over and looked out of the window. She was gazing straight down towards Mike Dowd's Sink. How often must Bow-Wow have passed within her range of vision!

"It is impossible," decided Mrs. Stuart, and the girl flashed a smile at her mother, a fond smile this one was, and there was something of the mother's patient sweetness in it. Of what a variety of moods was she capable! "I could not permit Mr. Stuart's name to be appended to a work which could not be wholly his own," went on Mrs. Stuart, with that quiet dignity which is bred in the gentlewoman with her soft slurring of r's. She relaxed her fingers in her lap, the gay little crimson jacket lying among them. She looked Billy Lane squarely in the eye, and her white

cheeks flushed, as she modestly added: "Mr. Stuart was so exact an authority that I feel it my duty to protect his reputation."

Ah! That much he had left her at any rate, that much of pride in him!

"Naturally," agreed Billy — reviling himself for his clumsiness. The girl in the window was standing extremely stiff and straight. One black curl had strayed down on her white neck, calling insistent attention to that beautiful, smooth, round column. "However, Mrs. Stuart," Billy went on, trying to remove his gaze from that curl, "would it not be possible to have this manuscript completed and edited by the most competent person to be found, and published under another name, or anonymously? The financial returns to you would be practically the same, and frankly, I believe it to be your duty to give to the world as much as you can of the technical genius of Harrison Stuart."

That was a new phase! Mrs. Stuart picked up the little crimson jacket and examined it thoroughly, but there was not another stitch to be put in it. She laid it down again.

"I don't know," she wavered.

"You might think it over," suggested Billy. "Here is my card. If you care to take up this proposition, I should be glad to have you let me

know. Or, may I call; some time next week, say?" In spite of himself, his gaze, as he said this, roved to the girl in the window. Again she was smiling at him, and this time there was an imp in every elfin curl.

CHAPTER IX

CONSPIRACY

“**A** LIVE!”

“And well!” shouted Billy.

“Thank God!” He knew it even before Billy had spoken, knew it before he had seen Billy’s face, knew it from Billy’s tread in the hall and his vigorous throwing open of the door, knew that at last they had been found, that they were alive, that they were well! He buried his face in his hands; but he straightened up quickly. Oh, yes, straightened and smiled; though the tears were streaming down his cheeks. It was a smile of such heartfelt thanksgiving that no verbal prayer of praise could have expressed it.

“Now, tell me!” He sat down, to show that he could be perfectly quiet, and he put his hands on his knees. “Tell me all about it! Tell me everything! Sit down, Billy!” and the older man hitched his chair closer. “How do they look? How have they prospered? Jean, my wife?

And what is my little Tavy like? Billy! Tell me!"

"In a minute," laughed Billy. "I'll have to sort those questions, Stuart. First of all, your little girl — Say, what is her regular name?"

"Octavia. What about her?"

"Well, she's a beauty! A regular stunner, Stuart! Big, dark eyes, but I couldn't tell exactly what color they are. Dark gray, like yours, I think. I never saw eyes so changeable; and they seem to read a fellow through and through! She must think I'm a blithering idiot, the way I stammered around when she came to the door. You see, I had just climbed four flights of stairs ——"

The old man, who had been listening with every expression of delight, suddenly held out his hand, and his face paled.

"Wait," he interrupted. "You say you had climbed four flights of stairs. Where were they?"

Billy gulped and thought quickly.

"In some mighty cozy apartments downtown. I never saw a more cheerful and homelike room in my life than the one I was in!" and he looked with disdain on his quarters. There was a world of ease in them, but no home. "They had your ma-

hogany drawing-desk in that room. It's a handsome thing!"

The old man's face softened. At least they were not poor! If the apartment corresponded to that mahogany desk, and he well knew the good taste of Jean, they were in comfortable circumstances. No doubt apartments would be more convenient for two lone women.

"Jean!" he begged. "What of her?"

"She is beautiful, too, and sweet. Of course her hair is gray."

"Tell me, Billy!" The words faltered on his tongue. "Her face; does it show much suffering?"

"No." Billy smiled reassuringly, though remembering the pathos in the patient eyes. "She has suffered to be sure, but her smile is angelic. Your daughter has a touch of her smile. She has the blackest hair that I have ever seen! It curls all over her head, little curls and big curls and tight curls and soft rolling ones. I never saw so many curls!"

Stuart, too, was laughing, rocking backward and forward in his chair and slapping his waxen white hands on his knees.

"Just like when she was a kiddie!" he exclaimed. "She was five years old when I last saw

her, and bright as a dollar! Just about this high," and he stretched out his hand as if she were standing at his knee, and he were patting her head. "I used to call her all sorts of names based on those inky curls, but she would have none of them. 'Tavy' was her name, and nothing else would do! She couldn't say Octavia." He mused, and smiled in fondness. "What did you think of my library?"

"I wasn't in the library," Billy acknowledged slowly, feeling that he was on dangerous ground.

"But the drawing-desk," puzzled Stuart. "That was always kept with the library. It fitted so well with the old mahogany bookcases. In what room was the desk?"

"Oh, just a sort of general room," evaded the young man.

"I know," smiled Stuart, quite content. "But it will be all strange to me, for the taste of Jean will be supplemented by the taste of Tavy, and of course she has ideas of her own. She had them even as a kiddie. Are her cheeks as red as ever?"

"Red? No!" vigorously denied Billy. "They're a more delicate tone than was ever spread on old ivory out of the most carefully furnished pallet box. She is like a pink pearl! She is like a wild white rose touched with the sunset!

She's a marvel, Stuart! She would set an artist mad, with her dainty coloring and her perfectly classical features! She is one who startles, and then attracts — compelling you to study her detail by detail!" and Billy warmed to his work, as he read in the glistening eyes of his partner the joy and the pride in this recital. "She beats anything I've seen in New York; and I've been around some! If she ever puts on a fluffy gown and appears on the Avenue, she'll be ——"

"On the Avenue?" The expression of keen delight faded from Stuart's face, and he studied the younger man sharply. "If she ever puts on a fluffy gown — Billy; don't hide anything from me."

Lane blushed. This had been his day for feeling contemptible.

"Well, I don't think they're rich, if that's what you mean," he finally blurted.

"What's their address?"

"Seventy-nine Vanheuster Square, North."

"And you walked up four flights of stairs. That means a cheap tenement. They were not in the telephone book. They were not in the tax list. They're poor!"

"They're well!" Billy stoutly maintained. "The rest of it we'll fix."

Stuart clinched his kneecaps with his lean fingers, and stifled a groan.

"They're poor!" he repeated, and set his teeth together. "How do they live?"

"Fancy work," plumped out Billy, driven fairly from cover.

"Work!" That was the one word Stuart caught, the word which made him wince. "I don't understand it. I thought I left them plenty of money; unless Jean paid certain outstanding claims which I had intended to take care of myself. But they couldn't have touched her money. That was why I turned my securities into cash for her."

"That probably explains it," surmised Billy, going back over their conversation. "You know, Stuart, it was too bad that this accident happened to you! What do you suppose she said, when I suggested that we could have the book completed? That it was her duty to protect your reputation for authoritative accuracy! She was proud of it, old man; and so was Tavy; proud as Lucifer! Her chin was tilted and her eyes fairly snapped with pride."

It was on this that Stuart broke. His resistance enfeebled by his illness, he folded his arms on the table and dropped his head on them, his fingers clutching convulsively.

"Buck up, old man," counselled Billy, pacing the floor in distress. He paused, and poured himself a drink. "The thing for us to do is to dig in and improve their condition. If you want an advance on what we're going to do this year, I'll fork it over cheerfully. You don't know how much pleasure it will give me," and Billy was quite sincere about that. "Now don't refuse! You've already saved my life on the Pannard Building, and your invention of that assembly hall truss will make a reputation for our firm. It's a piker proposition to say that you've already earned five thousand dollars, but you can take that much without any feeling of obligation. Now how shall we get it to them?"

Stuart had straightened up, and he smiled his gratitude. He was not yet quite master of himself, nor strong enough physically to expect to be.

"I've an idea!" presently figured Billy, as busy with the project as if it were a problem in floor loading. "We'll say it's recovered from some old account." It occurred to Lane that he might take the check around himself, and then it occurred to him that he would be compelled to forego that privilege. Mrs. Stuart might investigate. He gave up the gaudy plan with a sigh. "Who was your attorney?"

"Donald Cullam." Stuart was eager, now, as eager as his young partner.

"Then it's easy; unless Cullam's dead," rejoined the practical Billy. "If he is, we'll get another lawyer. Then, possibly we can make some money out of the book, after you've fussed it up. I am to see them about that again next week." He added this last with particular zest!

Stuart rose and paced the floor; keeping step with Billy.

"I have something to live for!" he said, with a thrill of new purpose in his voice. "God willing, I'll make what amends I can! I'm going down to the office to-morrow!"

"Don't overtax yourself," warned Billy and headed for his dressing-room, ringing for Burke and starting to unfasten his cravat as he went.

"Shall you remain to dinner to-night?" asked Stuart, reaching for a cigarette.

"Sorry, old man, but I'll have to allow you to dine alone," returned Billy, unbuttoning his collar. "I'm due at the Bennings'."

Stuart smiled, and glanced at the portrait on the mantel. It was a remarkably pretty face.

"Is my Tavy as beautiful as Miss Benning?" and there was a hungriness in the tone which excused the bluntness of the question.

Billy stopped, stumped. The idea of comparison had not occurred to him; and, to tell the truth, he had not thought of Geraldine since noon, when he had sent her some flowers. He looked toward the portrait on the mantel, and there was distinct worry on his brow. He ran his fingers twice through his hair.

"They're so different," he puzzled; and then his face brightened. "I don't think there could be much question about it, Stuart. Your daughter is the most amazingly beautiful creature I have ever seen!"

CHAPTER X

FACE TO FACE

WHO are these gay creatures bearing the breeze of idleness and frivolity into the sedate offices of William Lane, Engineering Architect? Why Geraldine Benning and Tommy Tinkle! Geraldine, fresh-cheeked and vivacious, wears an enormous fluff of white fox; a scarlet plume ripples from her white fur toque, scarlet sweet peas on her white muff. Tommy Tinkle is in full afternoon regalia from spats to gardenia.

The pictures on the walls of the severe little reception-room are all rigid iron skeletons of skyscrapers. They look, as Tommy expresses it, like the mounted remains of deceased buildings; Father Building, Grand-father Building, and little Willie. Quite facetious about them is Tommy, and delivers an entertaining lecture, while they wait, on the anatomy of commercial edifices. He even attempts to trace their evolution from the protoplasmal pig-iron germ to their present high

state of organic development; but he gives that up when the laughing Geraldine drops into a fleeting moment of seriousness and declares that the pictures represent achievement and accomplishment. Thereupon Tommy Tinkle, in a particularly infectious state of grin to-day, recites soberly, "How doth the busy little hornet improve each shining minute; he sees a neck, he sits upon it, he jabs his stinger in it." In conclusion, Tommy invents a tarantella step, and almost bumps into a grave and elderly gentleman with a silver Vandyke, who comes briskly in from the hall.

"Hello, John Doe!" said Tommy, and held out his hand in hearty greeting.

Smiling with pleasure, William Lane's silent partner accepted the proffered hand, and smiled again as he glanced at Geraldine.

"How is Tommy Tinkle since last night?" he inquired with mock solicitude. He was very fond of Tommy. Tommy frequently dropped around and played cribbage with him, when Billy was out.

"I'm amazing," declared the person of idleness. "I'm going to treat you, Mr. Doe. I'm going to permit you to meet Miss Benning. Miss Benning, Mr. Doe. Mr. Doe, Miss Benning."

Geraldine sparkled up at John Doe with instant liking, and he held her hand for a moment and patted it, with the fatherly impulse which had so recently sprung in his breast.

"I recognized you at once from the beautiful miniature in Billy's library," he observed with a certain stiff courtliness, which still bore the traces of disuse. "You probably know the rest."

"That the original is so much more charming!" promptly supplemented Tommy. "The star-eyed goddess of the morn, swathed in her rusty sheen, spreads roseate bliss o'er all the world, and her name is Geraldine! Repeat!"

Now came that energetic and ambitious young business man, William Lane, with a long, hard pencil behind his ear, and a frown of concentration reluctantly vacating his brow.

"Hello, loafers," he greeted them cordially, though a recurrent pucker came between his eyes. His head was still full of angular beams and rods. How had he meant to relieve that weight, at the intersection of the tower with the thrust of his arch? He knew he'd lose that vague beginning of a solution! "May I offer you some tea?" He was shaking hands with Geraldine, and laughing down into her eyes. There was a curious

speculation in her own as she studied him. Somehow, Billy scarcely seemed the same! Business, of course.

"You're to put on your bonnet and come right along with us," Geraldine confidently informed him.

"Oh, am I?" Billy cocked his head side-wise. He heard the 'phone bell in his private office. "Wedding or funeral?"

"Dance," explained Tommy. "Mrs. Wilton has snapped up the Lohkawanas for this afternoon, and they're to teach us the new Moukawa dance. It's a modified Hoola-hoola. If you don't come, you're a has-been."

"Better go, Billy," urged John Doe, with an indulgent smile. "There's no pleasure in being a has-been."

"Can't make it for an hour," worried William Lane, glancing at his watch; and Geraldine began to pout.

"He can; can't he, Mr. Doe?" She appealed with all her pretty art.

"Billy must have some vital reason if he resists you," laughed John Doe, and, with this diplomatic evasion, he bowed his adieus.

"Make him come, Tommy!"

Tommy Tinkle held both hands tragically aloft.

"I have ceased to belong to the ancient order of Innocent Bystanders!" he insisted. "When battle brews, I'm for the cellar! I'm going in and see Doe's collection of naked buildings. Fight it out," and he followed into John Doe's little private office.

"I don't think it's at all nice of you, Billy," Geraldine reproached him. "Every time there is anything special, you have some excuse; and I have to go just with Tommy. I promised Mrs. Wilton I'd bring you."

"That's bully of you," and he touched a forefinger affectionately to her pink chin. "I'll be out in as much under an hour as I can make it."

"That won't do." She laughed her gay silvery ripple. "You are to come with me!" Charming little way she had of ordering people about. She had ordered Billy for years.

"Then that's the program." He looked at his watch, and frowned in calculation. "I can get Doe to take up the Pannard Building with Joe Mullen. Doe's as good as I am; better. If you'll wait, I think I can be foot-loose in half an hour; or less."

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" She was justly indignant. "Wait! You'll put on your hat and come at once!"

Acute distress was on Lane's good-natured countenance.

"By George, I simply can't!" He took his pencil from behind his ear, and replaced it. "I have to tell my draughtsmen how to go ahead before I leave this office. Just run in with Mr. Doe and Tommy, and wait. Please, Geraldine!"

As she turned, she stopped abruptly. The hall door had opened, and there stood in it, diffidently, an extremely beautiful girl! Geraldine glanced swiftly at Billy, and then followed his pleased and astonished eyes to the girl again. Oval face, big dark eyes, black curls; trim little dark blue suit, but inexpensive; jaunty little dark blue hat, perked with a stiff white feather. The eyes, large, luminous, and, for a flashing moment, as they considered Geraldine beneath their long curving lashes, they seemed to change from dark gray to violet! Billy! He was positively beaming with delight! He almost rushed over to the girl! She was beautiful. Billy was absurdly suave, and there was not a trace of a girder, or a beam, or a bolt, nut, or even washer in his head! One could easily tell that!

"This is an unexpected pleasure!" Billy's voice rang. "Quite opportune, too; I have something for you!"

The young lady was very prim, as her dark gray eyes rested demurely in the exact center of Billy's frankly admiring gaze.

"That's nice," she dimpled. "Mother has just discovered a few extra pages of manuscript, which may or may not belong to the book, and she thought you might need them at once. She was unable to come out to-day."

"Too bad!" sympathized Billy, with every appearance of satisfaction. "Oh, Geraldine. Miss Stuart, Miss Benning." He stepped back with positive joy as he brought these beautiful creatures together. "You don't know what a tremendous pleasure it gives me to introduce you two girls." Then he added the fatal sentence which, since time began, has proved all men to be asses. "I'm sure that you'll like each other immensely!"

They did. They smiled at each other their intense delight at the meeting, the gray eyes and the brown. They each displayed a thorough appreciation of the other's undeniable beauty. Geraldine finished with a droop of her eyes and a fluff of her gorgeous muff. She was most gracious!

They chatted. They occupied the conventional moment or so with wondrous ease and poise, though imps began to dance in the violet eyes and twinkle from the black curls. How sweet and

soft-voiced the young ladies were! Billy was overjoyed.

Geraldine turned to him with her most engaging smile.

"I'll wait for you, Billy," she cooed, and went in to join Tommy and John Doe. Bully girl she was! Always extra sweet after a flare-up.

"Now for the manuscript," said Lane, and led the way to his private office, where, with brisk haste, he placed a chair at the side of his desk for Octavia Stuart, and sat down in his own swivel. Lady visitors were rare in the William Lane offices, and, moreover, this was the first time Octavia had called! Billy had been at the house three times, on business.

"Is your mother's cold no better?" he inquired solicitously, as the caller produced some neatly folded pages of manuscript from her handbag.

"Quite a bit, thank you," smiled the girl, lifting her eyes to Billy's, which was an awkward thing to have done, for it stopped him completely in something he was about to say. To save him, he could not remember what it was!

"Colds are very disagreeable at this time of year."

"Yes, aren't they?" Imps in the violet eyes, imps in the twinkling curls, imps in the fleeting

dimples. She serenely waited for him to open the pages of manuscript, but he chucked them into a drawer.

"I haven't had a cold this winter." He offered that in lieu of a brilliant thought, and wondered what was the matter with him. Dog-gone him, he wasn't usually dumb!

The girl suddenly took compassion on him; nice, big, good-natured chap that he was. How splendidly his head was set!

"Here's something you'll like," she smiled, and from her handbag she produced a sample of a place-card for a children's party. She was rewarded by Billy's instant hearty laugh. Such things as this had amused him so much the last time he was at the house. The sample folded into the shape of a Noah's ark, with a giraffe sticking its head out of the chimney. "They're all to be different, of course," she explained; "a monkey looking out of a window of one, and a green snake crawling around another, and — oh, all sorts of animals."

"Your idea, I'll bet. You and your mother have a positive genius for these little creative things." He was much more at ease, except that he was worried.

Why had he told her that he had something for

her! It rustled now in his pocket, as he closed the drawer in which he had put the manuscript. It was an advance royalty check for five hundred dollars, which he had wrung out of the book publishers. Brilliant thought! A dash of color in the drawer had caught his eye. Tommy Tinkle's fantastic sketches for a next-month costume ball. Wouldn't Tommy scream when those sketches were reported lost! "I said I had something for you, and here it is," he happily stated, producing the gay little sketches. "I thought your mother might use them for her dolls." Hang Tommy! He could make new ones, and naturally they would be different.

"Aren't they clever!" cried Octavia, her eyes sparkling.

Billy touched his pocket with satisfaction. His laugh was quite care-free.

"By the way," he observed, "I'm sure to have a check for your mother, in the late mail. I'll bring it down to the house, if I may."

Only a flash of the imps. The mails were still running, but, of course —

"That's mighty nice of you." There was a trace of her mother's drawl in her voice at times. Delicious! It was music! Billy violently re-

pressed the desire to mention her eyes, and her black curls, and a few other things.

"What a grand little hat!" He laughed at it as he had laughed at the place card, a laugh of pure delight.

A little touch of color came into the delicately tinted cheeks, but she dimpled.

"I like it," she confessed, and instinctively hunted for a change of subject. "We have had a streak of good fortune, mother and I. Father's former attorney has just recovered some money from an old account. Five thousand dollars!"

"Great!" enthusiastically returned Billy, with well expressed surprise. "By George, that's quite a little windfall."

"Isn't it!" She was most elated. "Mother is so very happy about it. We shall be able to clear up the very last of the encumbrance which lay against father's estate, and we have quite a bit left for outlandish luxury."

"Oh," and the blank expression on Billy's face was painful. He was actually distressed. "It's a pity you have to spend any of that money for outlawed claims. Can't your father's attorney do something about it?"

"He's always wanted to," she explained. "He

was angry, in the first place, because mother insisted on paying. In fact, he flatly refused. Mother threatened to dismiss him, years ago, on that account. Now we're glad that she persisted. There isn't one dollar of indebtedness against the name of Harrison Stuart!"

She was so proud of that. There was such a thrill in her voice; there was such a glow in her dark eyes that poor Billy had a terrific struggle at self-restraint.

Why the dickens wasn't it proper, for him to state his sincere and frank admiration! Why couldn't he just take her hand in his, say both hands, and make a few warm and heartfelt remarks, looking deep down into her eyes meanwhile, and — Oh, confound it!

"Possibly your lawyer may recover more," he suggested. They had a new job in the office, and John Doe was designing the entire structural work. He was a wonderful engineer! Why, by George, Doe was this girl's father! Strange Billy hadn't thought of that before, except in an impersonal sort of way. He had been so occupied with the girl herself that he had not thought of her, in this office, as being so tragically related to the man just on the other side of the partition! He was astounded and overawed by the dramatics of this

stupendous thought; so much so that he scarcely heard the reply she made. Why, here was she, sitting calmly beside him, and as sweet as a basket of roses, and right in the next office was her long-lost father! What an astounding situation! Billy was absolutely lost in the contemplation of it.

"Wait just a minute," he said, and jumped up with sudden impulsive decision. "I'd like you to meet my partner, Mr. Doe, the man who is to revise your father's manuscript." Could you beat that! Here was Harrison Stuart revising his own book, and had to pretend to be presumptuous about it! And here was his daughter! Tavy! "I'll see if he's in."

The private office of John Doe was occupied by Geraldine and Tommy Tinkle, and Tommy was making a careful, though somewhat idealized, sketch of Geraldine.

"Almost ready, Billy?" inquired Geraldine, smiling brightly at him. There was not a trace of petulance in her.

"Don't move," cautioned Tommy. "Don't move or I'll fore-shorten your nose."

Billy's ears burned with guilt.

"I'm rushing things," he hastily assured her, and hurried into the inner office, where John Doe,

tall and gaunt, bent over his drawing-board with absorbed interest.

"How are you feeling, Hal?" Billy inquired with anxious solicitude. The contraction "Hal" had been adopted between them as a safe compromise for public and private occasions.

"Stronger every day," returned the older man cheerfully. "I gained a pound and a half in the past week."

Billy inspected him with a critical eye. "Fine," he decided. "There's a client in my office I'd like you to have a glimpse of. Just peep through the crack of the door."

The old man smiled at that suggestion, but started towards the door.

"It's a young lady," added Billy, with a nonchalance which unfortunately had a break in it.

"Who is she?" The old man had stopped, and turned to Billy.

"I'll tell you about her later."

"Tavy!" He began to tremble. "It's Tavy!" and there was a vibration in the tone which thrilled the very roots of Billy's hair.

"Now, look here, Stuart, you told me you were feeling fine, you know."

The old man straightened, and pressed his lips firmly together.

"I am strong," he said. "I want to see my daughter!"

"Certainly!" Billy was at his side as he strode to the door; Billy was holding his arm. "Peep through the crack first, then come back and sit down a while, and I'll take you out and introduce you."

The old man smiled on him, then he threw open the door, and walked firmly into Billy's office.

Octavia saw before her a spare, courtly looking old gentleman, whose eyes had in them such profound longing that her heart went out to him at once in a thrill of sympathy.

"Mr. Doe, Miss Stuart," remarked Billy, feeling much as if he were playing with an uncertain trigger.

Mr. Doe smiled; he bowed stiffly; he opened his mouth to give some conventional word of greeting, but, instead, his trembling arms suddenly stretched forth, and a mighty sob welled up from his breast!

CHAPTER XI

WALKING ABOUT THE SQUARE

“**W**HAT is it? What was the matter?” Octavia had been startled. She was pale and trembling. Billy’s partner had completely broken down, and Billy had assisted him into his office. He was back now, his mind torn by his duty to the occupants of both rooms.

“The shock was too much for him,” he explained, groping wildly amid various bits of romance for a fabrication which would fit the case. “You reminded him so strongly of his own little girl. She was burned to death in a theatre fire. It was horrible!” and he wiped his brow. That was a pretty good one. “I’m so sorry that it upset you. May I get you a glass of water?” He was bending over her chair most anxiously.

“Don’t mind me,” she protested. “Poor old Mr. Doe!”

“You’re trembling!” Billy was almost in a panic. Of course it wouldn’t do to pat her on the



Geraldine came to the door at this inopportune moment.

shoulder or anything, but she really should be soothed. He took her hand instinctively and stroked her wrist. Just think, she was Stuart's daughter!

Geraldine came to the door at this inopportune moment, and she observed the wrist-stroking with great interest. Then she flounced back and took Tommy Tinkle away with her! Billy heard her going, and chased after her; but he was too late. When he returned to his office, Miss Stuart had discovered that it was time for her to go. She was still somewhat shaken, and Billy really felt that he should take her home in his car; but somehow he did not feel free to offer this accommodation. Eight o'clock he was to call with the check — if he received it.

There ensued a busy time for Billy. Tavy's father, too, was shaken up, and, though in command of himself, Billy sent him home for the day. Joe Mullen came, and that meant a solid three quarters of an hour conference. There was still the problem of the overload at the corner of the tower to be considered; but Lane got the idea for that while he was talking with Joe Mullen. Clever idea it was; but original and daring. He plunged into it as soon as Joe left. Fascinating piece of work! He had to turn on the lights

before he was through with it, but when he finished, he was proud of himself. It was a tremendous spur to be in business with a master like Harrison Stuart! He probably never would have had the nerve to conceive of this solution had it not been for the mental influence of Hal. In a glow of enthusiasm, he marked on his drawing the instruction for his draughtsmen, so that they could start at it in the morning; then he made a quick little sketch to show when he should arrive home. He was immensely pleased with his day's work!

Six-fifteen! He'd have to hustle. He'd better telephone Burke to — By thunder! He had forgotten that confounded dance! He stopped aghast, with his watch in his hand. Oh, well; Geraldine was a good fellow, even if she had probably gone away in a fury. He'd explain it to her. Anyhow, a man had his business to attend to! Business was important, and he quite overlooked the fact, that, besides, the daringly creative solution of a problem like this was more fun than a dance. A man could dance any time.

Too bad he couldn't see Geraldine to-night, and square things, but there simply wouldn't be time. He could not possibly be late at the Stuarts'; for it was more or less in the nature of a business appointment. He had to deliver that check!

He rushed for the decanter as soon as he reached his apartments, and he took two drinks in succession. He'd had rather an exciting day.

"I wish you didn't like that stuff so well, Billy," worried Stuart. "A young man of your temperament should choose another drink."

"I don't find the punch in the other," was the laughing reply.

"It isn't a punch you get out of this, sir, it's a jolt." Burke. He had been permitted to speak his mind freely, until now he felt the right to it. "Mr. Doe and I have no use for the beast."

"We have a league of our own," and Stuart's eyes followed Burke gratefully into the bathroom, where all further evidence of him was drowned in the sound of rushing water. "Billy, for the sake of my own conscience, I'll have to be serious with you about this question of whisky. It affects you too quickly, and it affects you too severely. The time will come when you'll have to let it absolutely alone. And by that time it may be too late."

Lane stood looking thoughtfully down into his empty glass. There were a couple of drops in the bottom, and he twirled them slowly around and around.

"I have been hitting it up a little freely," he confessed with frank self-judgment. "I'll

have to watch it. Let me see. I was lit up night before last, wasn't I?" His brow cleared, and he laughed. "That was certainly some party! We started in for a little game of fan-tan, and we ended up by serenading Sammy Langster and his bride. Regular country affair. We all got tea-ed trying to spiflicate sober Sammy in his own house!"

"Then last week," gravely prompted Stuart, who had no smile for the hilarious serenade, even though he recognized the genius of Tommy Tinkle in the background.

"Last week was different." Billy frowned, as he tossed his coat and vest on a chair. "I was down at the Pannard Building in the rain that night, and I got some of Mike Dowd's good old whisky. I took three drinks while I talked with Mike, and by the time I got up to the club I seemed to want more. First time I ever had that sensation; a sort of a craving. I don't like it."

The older man shuddered.

"Be careful, Billy," he warned. "That's a bad symptom. If that craving is ever firmly established in a man, it never quite leaves him as long as he lives."

"It can be controlled," argued Billy, who had no measure of this foe because he had never, as

yet, deemed it necessary to offer any particular resistance. "Look at you. Why, you haven't taken a drink since your second night here."

Harrison Stuart drew in his breath sharply.

"Do you think it has cost me nothing?" His voice was suddenly harsh. "Do you know how many weary hours I have fought, walking round and round that table?" and he indicated the decanter. "The yellow devil in that bottle calls to me in the night, it drags me from sound sleep, and, before I am awake, I am out here with that bottle in my hands! I have stood there holding it for fifteen minutes at a time, shaking from head to foot, with the perspiration pouring from my brow. I have sat down, weak and faint and sick, from the agony of that fight! No, don't put it away, Billy!" and his jaws set. "I have some safety in the very fact that my enemy is visible. The damned stuff waits for me! It tries to take me unaware! I walk into this room. I am studying some problem of construction. I have no thought of whisky in my mind, no apparent feeling for it in my body. Suddenly, just as I pass, my eye catches the golden glint of it; and then, before I know it, the fight is on me again. And it is all to be done over, Billy; over and over. Why, look!" He stopped his nervous pacing, and pressed his

hands upon his chest. "I am Harrison Stuart! I have everything in the world to live for! I have my work; I have my reputation to regain; I have my wife; I have Tavy; and I have the memory of that horrible hell to warn me! I know that one drink of the infernal liquor will set up in me a thirst which will not stop until I die! I have no strength to come back a second time. And yet, as I stand here this minute, I want it!" A piteous appeal rang into his voice. "I want it!" He reached out his quivering hands towards the decanter. His fingers were working convulsively, and over his countenance came such terrific traces of the bygone Bow-Wow, that Billy was horror-stricken! There was an agony of passionate desire in his suddenly blearing eyes, as they distended upon the gleaming yellow contents of the cut-glass bottle. He was bent and crouched, and, for a moment, it seemed as if he were about to seize the bottle, and drain it to its dregs, and die! Billy hurriedly snatched up the decanter. The old man's eyes followed it greedily, but he straightened, and, with a stern struggle of his muscles, regained control of himself. He was deathly pale, and a cold perspiration stood on his forehead.

"That's what it is to crave!" His voice was hollow and of inexpressible mournfulness. He

shook his head. "Hard liquor isn't for some people, and I'm afraid you're one of us."

Billy held out the decanter and looked at it as if it were some new species of bomb. He set it down slowly.

"If I thought it could ever get me like that, I'd never touch it again," he pondered. "But, Hal, I can't afford to admit that there is anything in myself which I can not conquer and control! To say that I do not dare do this or that would weaken me in my own confidence of strength. It would take something from me which I could never replace. It would rob me of one of the big things which make me a man. If I need to control this stuff, I'll control it; but I won't run from it."

"Run, Billy!" begged Stuart. "Be a coward! It's the bravest thing you can do! I have been thinking of all this with especial keenness to-day. You know, I met Miss Benning in the office. She's a charming girl, Billy; a delightful girl."

"Isn't she?" Billy's voice rang with enthusiasm. "The best girl in the world!"

The old man smiled.

"She likes you, Billy," and he shook his head. "Really though, speaking from the viewpoint of a bystander, I should be distressed to see you marry, with this tendency growing upon you. Very few

hard drinkers are reformed by marriage. The reformation must come from within themselves, or not at all. I am taking this liberty because of my gratitude to you, because of my affection for you, and because I know, as few men are unhappy enough to know, just how tragic the consequences of an unconquered fight against that foe might be. My God, Billy, can't you realize what it has brought me to! Didn't you find me in a condition lower than the brutes! Didn't you discover my gentle-born family humiliated, disgraced, and living in poverty? Didn't you see me, to-day, stand before my own daughter, and not dare to say that I was her father, and not dare to take her in my arms, not dare to call her my Tavy! And, oh, Billy, she's beautiful! Beautiful!"

Here, at last, was a proposition with which Billy could agree, and the look of distress left his brow.

"Didn't I tell you you wouldn't believe how beautiful she is until you saw her?" he enthusiastically reminded Stuart. "I'm going over there to-night."

"Are you?" The old man's earnestness was lost in his eagerness. Billy's reports of his visits to the Stuart home were what the old man lived on. If he could not go himself, he could go by

sympathetic proxy. "I'll sit up and wait for you."

"Go to sleep," urged Billy, beaming down at him in great friendliness. They were pals again now, conspirators together. "I'll waken you. I've a great excuse this time. That check!"

They both laughed. The framing of excuses for Billy to call at the Stuart home had been one of their most elaborate pastimes.

"You didn't give it to Tavy this afternoon."

"Certainly not!" laughed Billy in triumph. "I almost cheated us out of this call, but I remembered in time. What do you think of this, Hal?" and he tossed over the sketch he had brought home. "By jinks, I'll have to hustle!" In two minutes more, he was heard splashing.

So he was expected to marry Geraldine! He pondered this, as he deftly tied his black bow. What the dickens was the matter with people! Couldn't a fellow have a close girl friend without their being hustled into matrimony about it? Wouldn't Geraldine enjoy that! Why, they were as open with each other as Tommy and himself! They were all in a bunch together. People mighty seldom married in their school-day crowd. It was like marrying in one's own family. He seized

his brushes, and tackled his hair with impatient vigor. It was stubborn to-night. Tommy Tinkle was with Geraldine more than he, and nobody ever thought of marrying them!

"I think I'll go along," said Stuart, as Billy joined him at the table; and there were traces of imps dancing in his dark grey eyes. His hair had been black when he was young.

"Eh!" gasped Billy. "Oh, all right. Why don't you?"

The imps disappeared instantly.

"Not for one year from the night I threw the glass in your fireplace," he said; "the first night I saw you intoxicated. But I'm going far enough to look at the house, if you don't mind. I've kept myself from that long enough."

He did so. He located the entrance. He had Billy point out the windows; and then the young man went into the house, and shut the door behind him.

There were three windows in that room, all brightly lighted; but, from a near viewpoint one could only see the ceiling. From across the square, dim, old eyes could make out but little detail. At about half-past eight, a curly head appeared in a window. Tavy! She sat in a rocking chair apparently, but she did not rock much,

except as the chair swayed with the vivacity of her conversation.

A tall figure came to the window by and by. This was at nearly nine. Billy! He stood up, for quite a while, talking, and from that characteristic tilt of his head, occasionally laughing. He sat on the window ledge afterwards. At nine-fifteen there appeared a third figure at the adjoining window; a woman's figure, with smoothly drawn hair done high on her head; and the head was bowed slightly, but not much. Thank God, not much!

Jean! Oh, thou good and faithful Jean! Thou true Jean! Thou Jean that has suffered, and borne, and waited! Oh, may all the blessings of heaven and earth be thine, thou Jean! May there be happiness enough, in thy days yet to come, to efface, in part, thy misery in the weary years that are gone! Jean! Jean!

She peered out intently into the night, as if in her soul she heard that passionate call. It was cold out there, cold and damp.

"Why, I thought you'd gone home!" wondered Billy, when he hurled himself through the door, at half-past ten.

"No, I've been walking about the square," returned Stuart calmly, though he was shivering.

There had been much pain in that lonely vigil; but there had been great happiness, too. He had seen them both this day, wife and daughter; beheld them with his own eyes; and they were safe, safe and well!

"Rotten raw out here," commented Billy, with an uncomfortable feeling that he had been cheating Stuart. Somehow, he felt guilty that he was able to go through the door, while the man who had the natural right must stay outside. Young Lane had a most troublesome conscience. However, he could pay part of the debt and ease part of his guilt. "I've some great news for you!" he exulted. "You'll be able to watch them for two hours and a half Thursday night. I'm going to take them to the theater! We'll sit in a box, and I'll get you a seat which will give you the best possible view. I've a bully pair of folding opera glasses!"

CHAPTER XII

GERALDINE MAKES A RUN OF EIGHT

“**H**ELLO, Billy! Glad to see you!” and Geraldine’s voice dripped with honey. Billy Lane blinked. He could not believe in his luck! Why, all his worry had been wasted! It was not necessary for him to square himself for having failed to attend Mrs. Wilton’s dance. It was already done. There wasn’t a word, not even a frown or a cold, chilling glance! Wasn’t Geraldine Benning just about the best girl in the world! Sweeter every day! Or had Tommy fixed it? Good old Tommy!

“I’m glad to be seen.” Billy was as happy as any boy who has escaped a scolding. He shook Geraldine by both hands, and, drawing her arm in his, strolled back to the billiard-room, where he set up the balls for their occasional game. “I’ll have to stop double discounting you, Geraldine. You’ve been beating me too steadily.”

“Single discount then,” she gaily accepted. “It’s a tremendous compliment, Billy, to have you

object to the double discount." She banked her ball, and laughed as it came back to the rail and nestled there. "I've been making all the boys play with me, and particularly Tommy and Daddy."

"Particularly Tommy!" emphatically declared that young man, lounging in from the library. "I've played billiards so much that I walk bent."

"Get a cue, Tommy," ordered Geraldine calmly. "You have me to beat for the bank."

Tommy Tinkle took a cue and chalked it, and banked and lost, and sat in one of the high chairs.

"Give an account of yourself, Billy," he suggested. "Why didn't you get out to Mrs. Wilton's? I told Geraldine that the Pannard excavation fell in."

"I didn't believe you," laughed Geraldine. "You've fibbed for Billy so much that I've learned to double discount you." She made her first shot coolly and accurately, but her thought was only perfunctorily with the game.

"It is thus that loyalty is rewarded," sighed Tommy. "No matter what I start, I get the worst of it. Billy, why didn't you get to the dance?"

The culprit cast a guilty glance at Geraldine; but he met only the brightest and freest of smiles. By



The careless Tommy Tinkle, watching Geraldine with the practised eye of a color artist, noted a fleeting change in her tint.

jinks, she was well got up to-night! One of those soft, shimmering, pink, fluffy, filmy, lacy dinner gowns, pearls around her neck and in her gold-brown hair. Her eyes, too! He had never seen them so snappy. It was as if there were a smoldering fire in them.

"I'll make a clean breast of it and take my licking," he offered. "It started with Miss Stuart." Geraldine missed her shot, and stood back leaning gracefully on her cue.

"I was cheated," complained Tommy. "Geraldine says she's a stunner!"

"She certainly is!" Billy's enthusiasm was boundless. He was calculating his shot with an absorbed gaze. The careless Tommy Tinkle, watching Geraldine with the practised eye of a color artist, noted a fleeting change in her tint. Curious. There was an admixture of blue in that fleeting change, which lasted for but an infinitesimal instant. Probably due to a slight stoppage of the tiny surface veins. Billy made his shot, a well-timed three-cushion affair. "Miss Stuart's father was a very famous engineering architect, and I'm having a book published for Mrs. Stuart." He glanced at Geraldine, and found her eyes fixed wonderingly on him. She did not, however, ask him why he was concerning himself in the publica-

tion of the book. Billy explained it anyhow, in answer to the look. "I thought it was knowledge the profession should have." Somehow the explanation seemed lame, but he let it go. He ran three more points while he worried over the matter. "Well, Miss Stuart brought up some missing pages of manuscript yesterday, and Mr. Doe walked in while she was there. He went all to pieces! She reminded him so much of his little girl. She was burned to death in a theater fire. It was horrible!" Billy caught the astonished eyes of Tommy Tinkle fixed upon him, and he suddenly remembered that this must be startling news to Tommy. It confused him so much that he went wide of an absurdly easy "set-up."

"Terrible affair!" Tommy's tone was perfectly serious, as he came over to the table, and his face was grave. That look of astonishment had only lasted for a second, and the twinkle of amusement which had followed was as quickly gone. "I knew there must be some extremely tragic event in Mr. Doe's life; but, of course, he would not talk of such things to me," and as Geraldine stooped to pick up her handkerchief, Tommy stared searchingly at his friend.

"That is what drove Mr. Doe to drink," finished Billy, in his most sympathetic tones and with

a gleam of satisfaction in his eye. The thing was wound up so neatly now.

"I see." Geraldine's voice, too, was sympathetic. "Poor old Mr. Doe! I liked him so much. You must be very glad you brought him home that night."

"Well, rather!" Billy lounged over by Geraldine and sat down beside her for a comfortable five minutes. Tommy Tinkle was one of those in and out players who was likely to miss ten times and then run up a string of fifty. Geraldine's hand lay on the arm of her chair, and Billy put his own over it. The hand beneath winced at the touch; then it lay still and warm. "Doe's a wonder! He'll make my business the biggest in town. I'd say our business, but he won't have his name on the door. If it hadn't been for him, I wouldn't have found out what was the matter with the Pannard Building! I wouldn't have gotten the Arts and Sciences job at all; I wouldn't even have met Miss Stuart! Octavia is her name. They call her Tavy. Cuddly, isn't it?"

The hand on the chair winced, and jerked away. It wavered a second, and then went up quickly to touch a strand of gold-brown hair. It came back again, and snuggled its way under the big palm.

"How is he connected with her?" Geraldine

had developed into a good listener. It was a new trait in her. Billy, however, caught his breath. He was in a muddle again, and he was the more confused in that Tommy, already started on one of his aggravating runs, waited for an answer.

"Well, it was Mr. Doe who suggested that if there was another Harrison Stuart book it should be published." He breathed freely again. Tommy went on with his game.

"So that's why you couldn't come to the dance."

"That's why." It was easy sailing now. All the lies were behind him. "First, Mr. Doe nearly fainted. Then, Miss Stuart was all cut up, and I had to look after her. By George, she's a stunning girl! Then I had to send Hal home." Tommy looked up for a moment. "Then I had to 'tend to all of Hal's work and my own; and it was half-past six before I could get away from the office! That only left me an hour and a half to hike home, dress, get my dinner, and meet my business appointment." He laughed happily and patted Geraldine's hand.

"I thought it must be business," she smiled, and seemed very much relieved about something or other. "I rather looked for you to come around last night, and get your scolding."

"Didn't pull away 'til half-past ten," Billy

bubbled on. "I was a regular caller before I came away. Miss Stuart and her mother are bully entertainers!"

The muscles on the hand under Billy's contracted ever so slightly. Geraldine drew it away gently this time, and touched her hair again, and now she dropped her hand in her lap. A hot wave of hatred for the Stuart girl surged over her! She was herself astonished at its vehemence. After all, why should she hate the girl? There had never been anything between Billy and herself; nothing but close friendship; just the same as between Tommy and herself. Nevertheless she hated this beautiful Octavia Stuart! Tavy!

"Then your business was with Mrs. Stuart?"

"Yes. I had to take her down a check. I guess I'm the sly boy!" and he chuckled. "You know, I had that check in my pocket when Miss Stuart was in the office; but I wasn't going to give up my chance to call! Say, Tommy; you must see her. You'll go mad over her! Won't he, Geraldine?"

"That's what I told Tommy." The voice was calm, and even, and sweet. "Tommy would never rest until he sketched her. She might even arouse in him an ambition to paint — seriously."

"Not with my consent," stated Billy, with a

laugh which by no means concealed his earnestness. "By George, fellows, I'm crazy about her! You never saw such coloring, Tommy; such beautiful features; such variety of facial expression; such glossy curly black hair; such wonderful eyes! Say, Tommy, her eyes actually change color all the time! I could sit for hours and just watch them, as they vary with every thought. They have these long, curving lashes, you know."

"My turn!" The voice of Geraldine was suddenly sharp, as if she had pricked herself with a pin. She bent over the table and shot with such keen precision as she had never shown in any game. Her aim and her control seemed almost deadly. She made a run of eight, before Three-B Benning came in, and brought with him a change of topic and of thought. He chatted jovially with them for a while, and refereed the game, and stayed long enough to have a drink with the boys. Billy sipped his whisky slowly, and with a keen relish. Benning watched him thoughtfully. He shook his head.

"Billy, you're drinking too much," he bluntly observed. He felt entitled to speak plainly. Why, he had said "Googelly-googelly," to the boy in his crib.

Young Lane run his fingers through his hair

in distress. He was very much worried about this, not because he felt in any particular danger, but because his friends were suddenly so concerned. Other fellows of his set drank, but nobody seemed to worry so much about them.

"I don't understand it," he puzzled.

"You drink alone." Benning pronounced this as if it were the solution of the entire difficulty.

Billy glanced across at Tommy and Geraldine. They were in the midst of a warm argument over Miriam Hasselton; Tommy contending that she was clever, and Geraldine that she was shrewd. He walked into the library with Benning. He wanted to reason this thing out with him; to explain; to reassure; and to settle, too, certain doubts which had been forced upon his own mind.

Tommy Tinkle gave up his argument, and contritely acknowledged himself in the wrong, as he always did.

"Anyhow," he observed as he chalked Geraldine's cue, "Miriam is to be married, and why discuss her. So goes the world!" This with an affected sadness, which was not all mockery. "The crowd's breaking up. One by one they all get caught, and are married and drift away from us. Pretty soon, Geraldine, we'll be the only ones left." For just an instant that wince

of pain on his humorous features, and then he grinned cheerfully. Good old Tommy Tinkle! "I guess Billy's the next."

"No!" The voice of Geraldine was flat and colorless. Tommy looked at her, quickly. Had she flared in temper, he could not have been so impressed; not so saddened. Her face had paled, her lips were set, and her eyes were hard: "I'm going to marry Billy myself!"

CHAPTER XIII

SPRING!

SPRING. Grass and flowers and weeds burst through the brown earth wherever they can find egress, and vie, in their cheery green, with the budding trees. As if the vital forces which had brought them into life and being had stirred about its own concrete roots, the Pannard Building has shot up into the air like a huge fungoid of steel. Spring, too, has stirred into activity all the still dormant powers of John Doe. His frame is more erect, his step is more elastic, his cheeks have more of color, and his eyes have more of snap. Why not? He has worked like a tireless engine, and he has accomplished! Has he still gifts and abilities? There is a place to use them now. Has he the faculty to coin his talents into money? There is a place to spend it now. He had made a fortune up to middle-age. He can make another in the years which are left to him. Billy is to be thanked for this opportunity. God bless Billy!

And God help Billy. He is in need of help. Nothing seems to awaken him to the abyss which lays towards the end of his journey. Over-confidence; that is what is the matter with Billy. Modest enough in all other affairs, he is too sure of his strength in this one most important thing in his life. If he over-steps the bounds of prudence in his own indulgence, it is an accident. He is sorry! He will watch out for it the next time! But when the next time comes, it is an accident again. Billy, in these latter days, is remorseful, penitent, and ashamed, when such accidents happen; but, with the fatal sufficiency of youth, he believes that he can control himself, that he can stop before it is too late; and he will not have to call himself a coward, and run from the one enemy which can overpower him!

It is with these thoughts in his mind that John Doe pays one of his regular visits to the Pannard Building. It is Spring down there, too. The laborers, up aloft in that dizzying network of slender steel, whistle and sing at their work, as if they were some new variety of monster bird; and, at noontime, they lie down in their shirt sleeves on narrow ledges of steel, from which a false roll of an inch or two would dash them to death in the

street below; lie there, in the balmy air, with only the warm sun to protect them.

"Fine day, John." Ed Black, the foreman of the steel construction, a square, dark fellow built like an ingot, and looking as solid. Every line in him straight; cheeks, chin, nose, eyebrows.

"Beautiful. What's the weight of that girder, Ed?"

Right back with the information promptly.

"Looks a little light." John Doe shakes his head. "Let's see your blue print."

The weight is correct as per the drawings. John Doe knits his shaggy white brows for a moment. Billy's figures. A man not quite clear for the moment, might easily make a mistake. It is a serious matter to miscalculate the weight of a girder on the tenth floor of a big structure like the Pannard Building.

"We'll have to prove up those figures. That girder looks light to me."

"That's what Billy Lane said just a little while ago." Perfectly serene is Ed Black. If a mistake has been made, it is not his. His straight brows pucker a little at the corners, as he casts his eyes nonchalantly upward at the few fleecy clouds floating in the blue sky.

"Then I've wasted a trip. I didn't know Billy was coming here to-day."

Ed Black squints down through the diagonal web of the nine stories below him.

"I just now saw him going into that saloon; Mike Dowd's Sink; the Chicago Buffet it is on the windows."

Mike Dowd's Sink! How long has it been since John Doe has seen the inside of that place? Four months! It seems an eternity. He glances down at himself, and he smiles.

It is Spring even in the Sink, but the evidences are not freshness and brightness and gay carolling. They are the presence of some wilted mint in a glass on the back-bar, and the absence of certain familiar faces. Jerry-the-Limp is there, and Piggy Marshall and Red Whitey and Tank Tonkey, these four, and no more, except Mike Dowd himself, who stands as changeless as the years in his dingy apron, back of his dingy bar, on the alert for the dingy nickels of his dingy customers. Still broad of red face is Mike, and still yellow is the mustache which lifts when he grins. His hair is still plastered to his head, and fuzzed back above his ears; and the hands which he lays above the bar are still like great purple slabs of pickled meat, cut into fingers at the ends. All the others have

strayed out to wander between pleasant fields, and lie by night under friendly stars, and live on the fat of the land, without trouble and without toil. Theirs is the kingdom of rest, and this is the season of their reign!

"Loan me a pipe full," says Jerry-the-Limp. He is an artist, is Jerry. He is lame when he likes and whole when he will, and his eyes, squeezed up in his roughened and wrinkled old face, are narrowed to almost imperceptible slits, through the constant habit of whining for charity.

"Why don't you shoot your own butts?" Piggy Marshall, whose name describes him accurately. Reluctantly he produces three or four butts of smoked cigars, picked up from the streets and from the floors of saloons; and one of these, the most frayed, the most trampled, and the muddiest, he gives to Jerry-the-Limp. He drops one on the floor unnoticed, and is too stupid to miss it in the count as he restores the others to his torn pocket.

Red Whitey's little beady eyes glisten. He has a vermilion beard so sparse that his chalk-white face shows through. He moves over next to Piggy on the much whittled bench, and presently, with a vast pretence of tugging at his shoe tongue, he stoops down and secures the fallen butt;

whereat Tank Tonkey, whose belt measures his height, gurgles a laugh.

"Red's as quick with the lamps as Bow-Wow used to be," he observes.

"Bow-Wow? Oh, yes." Piggy Marshall. He always remembers Bow-Wow, after a minute of profound introspection. "Bow-Wow. Un-humh Humh!" He chuckles, without reason and without thought. Somehow, he always chuckles when Bow-Wow is mentioned.

"I wonder if they lagged Bow-Wow?" ponders Jerry-the-Limp. He is the keenest one in this crowd. He drinks less, and he sticks to whisky. It is currently believed that Jerry-the-Limp is a miser, and has a vast fortune hidden away somewhere. If they could find out where, they'd kill Jerry-the-Limp for it. "Did you ever hear where Bow-Wow went, Mike?"

Mike's mustache draws down instead of lifting. None of this crowd were in the place the night Bow-Wow went away; that is, none except Piggy Marshall, and he doesn't count. He can't remember consecutively.

"Naw," grunts Mike.

Piggy Marshall has an unexpected flash of remembrance.

"He went away one night with a swell."

"You're a liar." This from big Mike, who mentions the fact without passion and without prejudice.

A gentleman comes in at the narrow doorway, a tall, dignified, elderly gentleman in well-fitting clothes, shoulders square, head erect, eyes clear, silver Vandyke trimmed as smoothly as if it had been poured into a mold; a very prosperous and well poised looking elderly gentleman, indeed.

"Have you seen Mr. Lane recently?" No huskiness in that voice, no hesitation, no stammering for connected words.

"Billy Lane? He was here not five minutes ago."

Big Mike smiles reminiscently, but a trace of regret crosses the elder gentleman's countenance. He had hoped that the name might not be so well known! He walks up to the bar.

"A glass of Vichy, if you please."

While Mike Dowd produces the vichy, the stranger conquers a shuddering horror of the place, and turns to a calm inspection of the articles on the back bar; the worn-looking whisky bottle, the never-opened quart of champagne, the bitters shaker, the dusty little bowl of dusty plaster of Paris fruit, and all the other cheap odds and ends which Mike Dowd has accumulated through the years. Just

the same, every single item; not one change, except for a new chip in the largest wine glass. It's to his shame that all these things are so familiar. It is to his deep shame!

He turns from the bar. The same barrels at the back of the room; the same ghastly blue ceiling and walls; the same musty odor; the same dim haziness, as if it were a pit of Hades in which the sulphur had just burned out. The very sawdust on the floor might be the same, for it is the old familiar pasty mire. As he looks the hot humiliation burns in him! Why, this is where he had lived! It had been home! Home! That deep shame increases in him. It is good that he has come here this day. It is good that he remembers every loathsome object. Let him never forget!

Upon the benches sit four battered old hulks, no, three, for Jerry-the-Limp has now risen, and, with his most exaggerated lameness, is thumping across the floor, his face awhine. Red Whitey is looking mournfully at the ceiling; for Red, too, is an artist. With elderly gentlemen he always has contrition of soul! Piggy Marshall is uninterested. He only works on the sympathies of drunken men. Tank 'Tonkey's fish-like eyes follow Jerry-the-Limp anxiously. There might be

drinks for the crowd, for Jerry's guile is famous. All the same; everything!

A sudden nausea seizes the stranger. He could call each of these frowsy, unkempt, unclean beasts by their names, and they would answer. These had been his friends! Not one of them but is as good as he had been! Their foulness had been his foulness! Bow-Wow! That had been his name in this abhorrent hole, this cess-pool filled with human mire! God! How could Harrison Stuart have sunk so low! So far away from Jean and Tavy!

"Friend of Billy's?" Mike Dowd. He is inspecting the stranger with curiosity.

"Very much so." The stranger raises his glass to his lips and takes a contemplative sip, his mind filled with awe of this place, and of the unreal-like fact that he could ever have been a part of it. Jerry-the-Limp leans against the bar near by, and moans. He pays no attention to any one; just moans!

"Billy's a grand boy!" This from Mike. "Comes in here two or three times a week for some of my special. I have a barrel of the finest old whisky on the Bowery."

The stranger nods.

"Billy has friends everywhere," he says with a

touch of pride. "Does he always drink your special?"

"Two or three slugs every trip. He drank what you're drinking to-day. Are you John Doe?"

The stranger glances, startled, into the eyes of big Mike, but he meets there only the friendly interest of a man who has heard his praises.

"I am."

"St. Patrick!" That is only muttered. Mike Dowd leans back against his bar and gazes at John Doe as if he were one risen from the dead, and the more he gazes the more his wonder grows. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Doe!" and Mike, recovering from his paralysis, stretches forward a huge palm. "Billy's been telling me what a wonder you are!"

Jerry-the-Limp moans and moans, his poor, crippled leg drawn up, his hand pressed to his side, his head bent, and his mouth piteously drooped. He is suffering intolerable agony, is Jerry-the-Limp!

"I did not know that Billy was singing my praises." This with a trace of concern.

"It was only by accident that it started," returns big Mike, with an eye on his customers, and a monotonous evenness in his voice. "I was in on it

in the beginning, you know, and after that I kept asking. I ain't a bad fellow, Doe. I like to see people do well," then he leans against the back bar for another long wondering gaze. "St. Patrick!"

Jerry-the-Limp suddenly stops moaning. On the ear of John Doe there is a peculiar little bump, like a small mole. On the hand of John Doe there is a thin white scar. On the cheek of John Doe just at the side of his nose and above the neatly cropped mustache, is a small black burn like a powder mark. The eyes of Jerry-the-Limp open in unison with his mouth, his poor, crippled leg straightens down, his head stretches forward, and, for a moment, he scarcely breathes.

"Bow-Wow!"

"You're a liar!" yells big Mike. Placing one hand on the bar he leaps over it, and by some miracle of quick reaching, there is a bungstarter in his hand when he lands!

Jerry-the-Limp is gone, darting out on the Bowery as swiftly, with his poor crippled leg, as any other man could do with two whole ones.

Tank Tonkey and Piggy Marshall and Red Whitey are standing stupidly in a row, and gaping dazedly at the stranger, but when Mike Dowd looks at them they sit down in a row.

"Give them a drink," and John Doe puts some money on the bar. He reaches out and shakes hands with Mike Dowd. "Thank you," he says gravely, and passes out into the Spring.

It is Spring in Vanheuster Square. The annual blade of grass in the northeast plot has come up with sturdy persistence, and has been trampled down, and is done for the season. The dusty fir tree has hopefully shot new tips of green on its forlorn branches, and on the topmost bough sits a lone robin, that cheerful optimist who predicted Spring through all the snow and rain and dreary fog, and now he is carolling his throat out in triumph that his prediction has at last come true.

There are other signs of Spring in Vanheuster Square. In almost every window there is bedding out for convalescence in the balmy air and the healing sun. But in the fourth floor windows of number seventy-nine there is no bedding, there are no curtains, there are no shades. Only bleak emptiness and glistening blackness!

"I like the old place after all." A beautiful girl with shining black curls and an oval face, and wonderful big dark gray eyes.

"You'll like the new one better, Tavy," smiles the tall young man, as they look up at the bleak windows. He is a handsome fellow, well set up,

broad shoulders, clear-eyed, and with a good nose, jaw and chin. There are no marks on him, as yet, that he has had any hurt. Those marks seldom come until the damage has been done; for nature hides her own shame as long as she can.

"Of course we'll like the new one better, Billy," replies Tavy, her big eyes turning up to him, and as they catch the blue of the sky, they too, are blue. "But we were happy here, mother and I. I guess because we were so busy. Billy, I want to confess something to you. I miss our work."

"Tragedy," laughs Billy. "Not having to work is the easiest thing in the world to get used to. Besides, there's your music, and your French, and all the other things."

"Wonderful, isn't it!" The long curving black lashes droop over the big eyes as they muse. "Here were we, slaving away, but cheerful, because mother's bravery would make any one cheerful, when along comes this mine in which father held some mislaid stock, and it's paying us remarkably! Why, it gave us two thousand dollars last month! Look at me!"

Would any one, to say nothing of Billy Lane, need a second invitation to look at Tavy Stuart, as she nears Billy's machine in sunshiny Vanheuster Square? She wears a gown which has been ex-

pressly made to fit her adorable little figure; and such a beautiful, slender, rounded, petite figure it is! The gown itself is a marvelous creation, and its materials and colors are selected to be exactly the thing which should go with oval cheeks, and a delicately tinted complexion, and black ringlets and dark luminous eyes, and Springtime!

Billy Lane, thus boldly invited to look, does look, and looks to his heart's content; and there is that in his eyes which makes Tavy drop her own, clear and steadfast as they are, and a warm flush steals up into her cheeks. So she climbs into Billy's car to hide it; and what should Billy do but follow her! He is William Lane when he looks at his watch.

"We've loafed around this old square for nearly an hour!" he exclaims, as he starts the run-about.

"Just because I had to find my poor little keepsake gold piece," she contritely replies. Then she laughs. "But anyhow we did find it."

"I'll send a carpenter up there to-morrow to repair the damage," promises Billy. "Suppose we take Mummy Stuart out the road somewhere for dinner? I've only half a dozen letters to sign at the office, and then I'm free."

So to the office they go, and find Spring even

there; for the snub-nosed city bred office boy leans limply out of the window, with some wistful hereditary instinct for rod and line, and hook and worm. Back into Billy's room; and Spring there, too. A little branch of apple blossoms in a drinking-glass on his desk. The letters are ready, and he signs them in a hurry, Tavy looking over his shoulder and admiring his strong, free signature. She is so adorable when Billy looks up that he drops his pen.

"Tavy!"

She begins to tremble. There is something in Billy's tone which tells her far more plainly than words that the inevitable moment has come. Billy is going to propose, and it is a very, very fluttering moment.

"Tavy!" He is on his feet now. He is so big and so tall, so overwhelming. Tavy shrinks a little from him, but not far, not very far. "I love you!" Straight out like that, no stammering, no approach, no leading to the subject at all, just a plain, plump outburst. He strides to her, one long, swift step, and the next thing she knows, Tavy is in his arms, both his arms! They are wrapped closely around her, so tightly that she can feel the beating of his heart. Or is it her own, pounding and thumping away like that? She can

scarcely breathe. Her breath flutters, and her cheeks are burning. Now he is kissing her, again and again and again! Her cheeks, her brow, her eyes, her lips, and his own are like flame. "I love you! I love you! I love you!" Over and over he is saying that, over and over, and little Tavy presses limp in his arms; and when his lips seek hers, her lips cling, too!

A little space, a space in which the whirling worlds within them readjust themselves to their new spheres, in which Billy and Tavy call back time and place and season, and put them in their proper order; and then Billy, smiling down at her in wide-eyed wonder that all this miracle could have happened, kisses her once more and reminds her of something.

"You haven't answered me."

She darts a happy smile at him, but there are little imps in her violet eyes, imps in her twinkling curls, imps in her fleeting dimples, imps in the curving lips; but the lips are tightly closed, and she hides her face in his coat.

"I asked you a question, and you haven't answered," insists Billy with great severity.

The flushed face reveals itself for a moment, but all the imps are still twinkling there, then the oval cheeks are hidden against his coat.



"No!" The tense strong voice is that of John Doe. "I would rather see her dead!"

“Will you marry me?”

Another flash of the dancing imps. She is tantalizing, ravishing — oh, everything wonderful which words have not yet been invented to express! But Billy is in a quandary. He ponders a long time as to how he shall next go about it. While he is still pondering, Tavy suddenly pushes back from him. The imps are gone! The face is sweetly serious, and the big eyes, steady and strong and clear, are dark gray now. But there is much more in them than color — love and truth and eternal fidelity!

“Yes, Billy,” she gravely says.

“No!” The tense, strong voice is that of John Doe. He stands in the doorway, and on his face there is a look of such horror that Tavy shrinks back into the embrace of Billy’s arm, in terror at this wild-eyed stranger. “I would rather see her dead!”

CHAPTER XIV

THE ENCHANTED PARLOR

I WOULD rather see her dead! Even as his own words rang in his ears, the John Doe who had been Harrison Stuart realized, by the expression in his daughter's face, that he had made a mistake. Perplexity, fright, even resentment; these were normal; they were to have been expected; but not that deathless pledge which was in the luminous eyes, as she turned them, for an instant, upon Billy! Love, truth, eternal fidelity! How well he knew those qualities in Jean; and such women are born to suffer!

Sickened at heart, he knew that he could not in any way affect Tavy, except to pain, by the statement that Billy had on him that curse which might render her life as wretched as her mother's had been. He knew that his only way to save her was to reveal himself. He did not dare! Why, only within this hour, he had endured a terrific battle with that devil of thirst, which continuously reached out its yellow clutch to drag him back to

perdition, to Mike Dowd's Sink, to the kennel, to Bow-Wow!

For a moment — an eternity in seeming, seconds in reality — his eyes lingered upon the scene, and it seared into his brain. The late afternoon sun, golden with the warm glow of Spring, had slanted into the little office, had touched with a mellow luster the soft brown graining of Billy's desk, had cast a refulgence like a halo upon the sprig of apple blossoms in the glass, and had blessed, with an aureole-like radiance, Billy and Tavy, as they stood near the window, Tavy still sheltered in Billy's arm, and broad-shouldered Billy turned sternly towards the intruder. Tavy! In her eyes was growing that same smoldering passion of defense, which he remembered so well in Jean. Tavy had taken Billy to be her own! Abruptly the old man turned and was gone from the room! Billy ran after him into the hall, but heard only the click of a descending elevator.

"What was it, Billy? What did he mean?" Tavy's voice was trembling.

"I can't understand it. Hal and I are good friends. There is no reason for what he said!" Billy was more hurt than angry.

"Of course not!" The answer was prompt, and full of resentment. "But why should he pre-

sume to interfere? What right has he to even speak to me concerning you! Who is he that he can take such liberties?"

"He must be unbalanced to-day." Billy suggested this explanation in answer to his own perplexity as much as to hers. Who was John Doe? Tavy's father, after all! What had Billy done for which he could be criticized. The only thing was that little matter of drinking. Hal had spoken to him several times about that, but surely he could not hold it of such importance as to wish his daughter dead rather than married to Billy.

"That's it!" Tavy's troubled eyes both cleared and softened. "Do you remember how strangely he acted that first day he saw me? He must have loved his daughter very much."

"Yes, Tavy." Billy's voice was very gentle as he drew her to him; and he was very thoughtful of her, and of Hal, and of many things, as they walked across to the desk. He looked at his watch, and took up the 'phone. "Suppose we tell Mummy Stuart about that impromptu dinner party."

"Oh, yes; do!" All brightness now, and happiness, nothing in her voice but the joy of living. So soon are the tragedies of life forgotten, when one is young.

Billy asked for the new number, which was already so familiar. Tavy stood near him, and, as he held the 'phone, he reached out and stole his arm around her slender waist. Her cheeks flushed as she nestled against him, but she slid her arm across his shoulder, and fluffed his hair. She had always wanted to rumple his hair. It was so wayward in its waviness, so stiff and uncompromising.

"Hello, Mummy Stuart," he called into the 'phone. "We want you to drive out to Woodbriar for dinner. Will you be ready when we come? Tavy's at the office with me. We found her gold piece. Say; we've something we want to tell you! The biggest bit of news in the world! We ——"

A small palm was clapped over his mouth. He looked up laughing, and the cheeks of Tavy were flaming red. He drew her hand away, and the playful struggle which ensued ended with Tavy once more in Billy's arms, and being kissed again and again and again, and being told over and over and over how Billy loved her and loved her and loved her!

A voice, a woman's voice, faint and far distant and strangely metallic, finally penetrated into their consciousness. It was the voice of Mrs. Stuart,

plaintively saying "Hello " through the telephone at regular intervals.

"Cut off," glibly apologized Billy, with a wink at Tavy and a pat of the hand which had done the cutting. "We'll be home in twenty minutes."

Billy fully meant that, but it took five minutes to put on Tavy's coat and to fasten it beneath her piquant chin; it took five minutes more to explain just how it felt when Tavy looked at him that first day at the door; and it took an uncountable length of time for them to say "good-by," as they left the little office, although no one could possibly explain why they should need to say good-by when they were both leaving at once, and together, and bound for the same destination. Queer; wasn't it? Neither of them thought of John Doe again.

What a wonderful ride that was to the new Stuart apartments! The world was such a delightful place, so cheerful, and bright and happy! Everybody in the streets seemed gay, and in the very air there was a sort of limpid ecstasy, much as if the glory of the millennium had suddenly burst open the earth and made all humanity kind. How balmy was the breeze of Spring! How beautiful was the evening sky, reddening now to a glorified dusk! On the river, as they whirled up the Drive,

were the white hulls of a hundred craft, trailing their wraith-like streamers of pearl gray smoke against the soft roseate of the west, and reflecting their graceful outlines in the glistening river, itself aglow with dancing coral tints. It was a fairy land, and even those tall, prosaic smoke stacks on the Jersey shore were a part of the enchanted scene. That is what it is to be in love, when one is young! Why, in all the world there is nothing but beauty! just beauty!

Here is the enchanted apartment house, with an enchanted doorman in an enchanted marble lobby; and here is the enchanted elevator, run by an enchanted elevator boy, with twenty-four brass buttons on his coat, and a blue bruise, probably put there by enchantment, under one eye. Here is the enchanted suite, and here, too, is the enchanted Mummy Stuart, already dressed for her drive in her new gray silk, which is so becoming to that high-piled gray coiffeur. A rather stately woman, is Mrs. Stuart, and one whom any fastidious young man might well be proud to have as his guest at Woodbriar. Money is not such a bad thing after all. It cannot be altogether bad when it will coax the delicate tint of health to pallid cheeks, when it will smooth away lines of worry from careworn brows, when it will bring the

sparkle of renewed anticipation to eyes which have been all too patient.

"You're late," accused Mummy Stuart, smiling on the two truants as they came bubbling into the pretty little parlor. "What have you been doing all this time?"

That was so direct a question, so apropos, so remindful of so many things, that Billy and Tavy, much against their wills, looked at each other, and laughed aloud, and both blushed. Then Tavy suddenly hid her face on her mother's shoulder.

Mrs. Stuart paled, and glanced swiftly at Billy, and clasped her daughter in her arms, and smoothed her tight black curls. Billy Lane found himself left out of that tableau, which was not as it should be; so Mrs. Stuart, with her cheek bent against that curly head, suddenly felt a strong arm steal around her, and glanced swiftly up to find the clear, manly gaze of Billy beaming fondly down upon them both.

"Kiss your future son, Mummy," invited the brazen Billy, with his most friendly grin, but only his words were flippant; tone and look were tender. Into Mrs. Stuart's eyes had again come that patience, and there was moisture on her lashes; but she smiled to Billy. She patted his hand as she unwound his arm from her waist. She liked

Billy. She had liked him from the first, very much. He was the sort of young man who could be trusted. She walked away with Tavy into the adjoining room, and closed the door. Tavy did not look back. She was very, very quiet, and held closely to her mother. They had been much more than mother and daughter, these two, in the past fifteen years; they had been companions, and partners, and friends, very close and very dear friends.

They were gone a long, long time, and before they returned, Billy, all alone in the dainty gray and pink parlor, began to feel disproportionately big, and brutal, and generally contemptible. It was all very gay and exhilarating to win a sweet and beautiful girl like Tavy, but, after all, there was a serious side to it. He couldn't expect Mrs. Stuart to look on him with a happy eye. She'd be left alone, even if she came to live with them; as of course she would. Dog-gone it, he was selfish, and yet — Suddenly he laughed. Why, Mrs. Stuart would shortly be about the happiest woman in the world! When Harrison Stuart was quite sure of himself, Billy would have the extreme pleasure of leading that finely rehabilitated gentleman to the door, and presenting him, as Billy's own gift, to Tavy's mother. He guessed that

would about square accounts! He could have Tavy with a clear conscience.

Again he felt a pang of selfishness. He had a most uncomfortable conscience. Here he was planning his own pleasure out of that re-union; here he was, bathed in the ecstatic happiness of having secured the most wonderful girl in the world for his own, and somewhere Harrison Stuart, Tavy's father and Mrs. Stuart's husband, was sitting by himself eating his heart out. Billy felt rotten! By George, now he understood why Hal had made such a queer break, up in the office! It was rather a hard jolt for a father who has spent every waking minute waiting for the time when he could fold his long-lost little girl in his arms, to find that a big hulk of a young man was taking her away before that joy could ever occur! Why, by the time Harrison Stuart came to the day of his glorious re-union, he wouldn't have any little girl; there would be no Tavy; there would only be a Mrs. Billy Lane! Of course Hal had worded the thing a little strongly, but no wonder! Billy felt more and more rotten. He guessed he'd call Hal up, and he went into the vestibule to do it; but just then Mrs. Stuart and Tavy returned to the parlor, and Billy Lane, with startling suddenness, forgot all about lonely Harrison Stuart, sit-

ting in the big chair by the fireplace, gazing motionlessly into the dark corner, where the logs of winter had cast forth their ruddy glow.

Mrs. Stuart walked straight up to Billy, and held out her hand, and, as he took it, she gazed long and searchingly into his eyes.

"You'll be good to my little Tavy, always," she said simply, and the young man, looking down at her, and feeling mean and small, somehow, because he was robbing her of so much, gulped that he would; and he meant it from the bottom of his heart. He meant it!

Tavy knew that he meant it, too. There she stood, her dark violet eyes sparkling up at him, and full of such supreme trust and confidence in him that once again Billy felt humble and awkward. Why, it was a frightening thing to become sacredly responsible for so helplessly a beautiful creature! Her long lashes curved down over her eyes, and they glistened slightly as they flashed in the light. There had been moisture upon them. Billy was silent for some moments in the contemplation of the marvelous change which had come over his thoughts and his life. He was responsible for an immense amount to these two women, and, by George, he'd prove himself worthy of the responsibility!

“ Would you rather go out to Wimbol’s Inn? ”
he asked.

Both ladies laughed. It was a relief to hear
him.

CHAPTER XV

A FAMILY POW-WOW

TOMMY TINKLE, alone in his room at the club, was the first to receive the glorious news, and Tommy Tinkle was delighted with Billy's good fortune. There was a sincere handclasp, a moment of serious and earnest congratulation, and then Tommy was his old cheerful self again. If he had reflected sadly that he was soon to lose his life-long companionship with Billy, he betrayed no sign of it; and if there were shattered dreams which Billy's joy had brought to mind, there was no shadow of them to be seen on his broad face. His wide grin had still in it that familiar whimsicality, as, at Billy's command, he put on his hat.

In the tap-room were Sam Langster and Jack Greeves and Bert Hasselton. Billy stopped long enough to buy them a bottle of wine, while Tommy broke the news, and the boys joined thoroughly in Billy's happiness, so thoroughly that he bought

a second bottle before he and Tommy went out into the night.

It was a glorious world, full of nothing but pleasure! It was a world full of friends, full of opportunities, full of triumphs, full of bliss! Possibly there were such things as tragedies, but those were remote and to be expressed only in words, like the bombastic sentiments of a school-boy. They were unreal, and by no means to be written in heart's blood. Only happiness was real; happiness and love!

They took a long drive in the fresh night air, Billy not caring particularly where they went. It was a beautifully clear night. The sky was white with stars, and a great round moon rode straight overhead, casting down upon the river a thousand glinting jewels. With brave unconsciousness, Billy had quite naturally chosen the Drive, since that led him past the Stuart apartments, where the enchanted doorman stood in the enchanted marble lobby, accepting a cigarette from the enchanted elevator boy. Billy did not know that the skies were clear, that the moon was shining, that the river was gleaming and dancing under the silver radiance. He was talking, and all the burden of his conversation was just Tavy! Tommy Tinkle, politely suppressing that whimsical grin, listened

piously, and even threw in an occasional remark to draw his friend on. Good old Tommy!

It was one o'clock when they reached the apartments, and Tommy decided to run up and say "Howdy" to Hal, if he were still awake.

Hal! Billy's conscience gave him a tremendous twinge. Half a dozen times, during the dinner at Woodbriar, and on the way home, and on the way to the club to pick up Tommy, he had given a fleeting thought to Tavy's father, but, for the most part, he had forgotten Hal. Selfish of him; rotten selfish!

There were no lights in the big lounging-room, when Billy and Tommy entered, nor was there any fitful red glow in the wide fireplace. Silhouetted against the window, however, was a bent figure, sitting so motionless that at first they thought Hal must be asleep. As the lights flashed up the old man turned, and his face was haggard.

"I'm glad you came, Tommy." The voice was husky and the eyes were feverish. "I have something to say to Billy which I wish you to hear."

Lane's head was up in an instant.

"If it's in relation to what you said in the office this afternoon, I'd like to have Tommy hear it, too. Frankly, Hal, I could not understand you. What have I done?"

“ Asked my daughter to marry you.”

Billy's face flushed, but perplexity still struggled with his rising anger.

“ Of course I did. I had every right to do so.” He turned to Tommy. “ It is perhaps as well to tell you, Tommy, that Miss Stuart is Hal's daughter.”

“ I had gathered as much.” Tommy had stood by the door, with his hat and gloves in his hand. Now he put them on the table, and sat down. He lit a cigarette, and prepared himself for a most disagreeable task.

“ Just why should I not marry Tavy?” demanded Billy.

“ There is the reason ! ” and the old man pointed to the decanter on the table. “ I'd rather see her dead than married to a drunkard ! ”

“ See here ! ” Billy's voice was shaking with anger. “ You've gone too far with this thing, Stuart ! I can quite understand that, because of your own experience, you should have an exaggerated dread of whisky, but that you should stretch that attitude so far as to call me a drunkard is more than I have patience for.”

“ Any man who neglects his business because he's intoxicated, who becomes drunk time after time, and is surprised that it happened, and who

still clings to whisky, is a drunkard, or bids fair to become one," retorted Stuart. "I have watched you day after day, Billy. You have been going exactly the path I went, to the last minute step. You have exactly the same kind and degree of craving which I had at your stage of development as a drinker; and there is no salvation for you unless you put whisky absolutely out of your life!"

"I'll never do it!" Billy's jaws were squared and his lips compressed. The decanter stood near him. Entirely unconscious of the fact that it was this very thing of which they were talking, he poured himself a drink, and pushed the decanter over to Tommy. Tommy watched him curiously. Billy, still unaware of what he was doing, swallowed his drink. "I shall not relinquish my control of any factor which enters into my life," he declared, as he set down his glass.

"Then you shall never marry Tavy!" The old man was as steady now as Billy, and there was as much determination in his voice. He stood tall and straight, and his white face was rigid.

"What will you do to prevent it?" There was insolence in that tone, the insolence of youth and strength, but it was excused by Billy's thorough belief in himself and his rectitude.

"I don't know," returned Stuart musingly. "I have been thinking of that and of nothing else ever since I left the office. I shall do something, however, when the time comes. If I have wasted my life and theirs, I shall see that they run no further chance of distress. I can do that much at least," and there was the light of a growing fanaticism in his eyes.

Billy gazed at him a moment incredulously.

"I hadn't expected this of you, Stuart."

"It does look like ingratitude," admitted the older man. "You brought me back from worse than death; you gave me a chance to be a man; you found my family for me; you are making it possible for me to ——"

"Forget that," interrupted Billy. "We are not discussing favors nor obligations."

"I must!" Stuart's voice was strained and tense. "It is because I owe you so much that this day has brought me such pain. As I have watched you, Billy, I have become more and more concerned for you; but now the tragedy is so much greater since it affects my daughter. Billy, if only you were free from this one danger, I would gladly lay Tavy's hand in yours, and close my eyes in peace. I have only one hope: to convince you of your position. Tommy, you know Billy well;

you have known him all your life. You have seen him year after year. Tell me frankly; have you ever worried about his drinking? ”

“ Yes.” Tommy glowered at Stuart. “ Billy, I had intended to talk with you myself, but after what you told me to-night, I decided that you wouldn’t need to talk.”

“ That’s right, Tommy.” Billy’s pleasure in Tommy’s opinion was boyishly frank. “ Why, Stuart, I wouldn’t cause Tavy a moment’s distress for anything in the world! ” His voice had suddenly grown kind. “ I don’t blame you for being excessively afraid of the thing which destroyed you; but you mustn’t let it warp your judgment.”

“ I don’t.” Stuart shook his head sadly. “ I’ve seen Tommy drinking nearly as often as you, but I know that Tommy is in no danger. He will go through life just as he is now. You won’t. You’re one of us, one of those who dare not touch whisky, and the signs are as plain to my eye as the mark on the brow of Cain. Listen, Billy. You are the last man on earth against whom I could hold enmity or against whom I would wish to be unjust; but, until you have shown me that you are permanently stronger than this stuff, you must never marry Tavy! ”

“ That’s something we can agree on,” and

Billy, laughing good naturedly, walked over and extended his hand to the old man. There was a tremendous appeal in Billy. He was a big, fine looking boy, and his smile was so contagious that it had smoothed all paths for him. Stuart studied him a moment doubtfully, then he shook hands.

"That's a bargain, Billy," he granted.

"Then let's change the subject," offered Tommy Tinkle, in tremendous relief. "These family pow-wows drive me to drink," and he reached out for the decanter.

At day-break, the long suffering Tommy was sitting huddled in the big library chair, with his eyes half open, while in his ears was being regularly thumped, Tavy — Tavy — Tavy — Tavy!

There was no sleep in Billy, though. When Tommy Tinkle, unable to keep his ears or eyes open any longer, tumbled in for a good long sleep, Billy went to his desk and plunged into work. He'd have to pay stricter attention to business now. It meant something when a fellow was going to be married! And he'd watch that little matter of drink! He had been rather careless of late, but his days of bachelor irresponsibility were over! By George, he owed it to Tavy to become a solid, substantial citizen, like Three-B Benning. Geraldine. His conscience rather hurt

him about Geraldine. He hadn't been around to see her for — let's see. How long was it? He'd send her some roses in the morning, and, soon as he found time, he'd run out and tell her the glad news. She'd be tickled, of course. A fellow was mighty lucky to have a chum like Geraldine.

At seven o'clock Billy locked away his work, and called Burke, and enjoyed a hearty splash and a healthy breakfast, and, fresh of garment and keen of eye, went down to the Pannard Building. He accomplished perfect prodigies of labor that morning; and, at noon, he went up on the avenue to buy a ring! He was so frankly delighted with that task, that the head of the diamond department came over and spent twenty minutes with him in selecting the jewel of the finest cutting and color. Then Billy, with the ring in his pocket, whirled gaily up to the enchanted apartment, and put the ring on Tavy's finger, where it glowed and sparkled and flashed as a symbol of their never-ending happiness.

Billy had only a minute in the enchanted apartments. He was very busy, oh, tremendously busy; and all four of the dainty little rooms seemed to vibrate and crackle and tingle from the verve of him. He enjoyed a laughing little banter with Mummy Stuart, now quite proud of her

handsome big son-in-law-to-be, and he made an engagement with them for the theater that night, and he enjoyed an ecstatic five minutes or so alone with Tavy, or was it ten, or maybe fifteen; then he rushed away, like a racing aeroplane, for a plunge into business again.

At the club the aeroplane hesitated, hovered, then came down for a few minutes — just a brief little run-in, to order tickets.

CHAPTER XVI

A LITTLE GAIETY FOR TAVY

“**Y**OU are like sunshine in a garden, child,” exclaimed Mrs. Stuart, as she received Geraldine in the dainty pink and gray parlor. She had a keen love of bright color, which had found its expression in the gay little court dolls she had made down in Vanheuster Square, and Geraldine’s afternoon frocks always delighted her.

“I feel like a spring bonnet,” laughed Geraldine, looking down at the rose silk, and once more deciding that its becomingness quite excused its brightness. She sat by the window and glanced out at the shimmering river. The trees along the Palisades were beginning to feather out, and their greenness to-day, for the first time, was visible from this distance. A trace of speculation came into Geraldine’s eyes. “It’s a beautiful afternoon. I thought that perhaps Tavy might care to go for a drive.”

“I don’t know that she has any engagement for

the afternoon," considered Mrs. Stuart contentedly. "She can't stay out late because we are going to the theater this evening."

Geraldine's lashes drooped for the most infinitesimal flash of time. She knew quite well with whom they were going.

"I'll bring her back at four-thirty," she gaily promised. "That will give her time for the nap to make her especially beautiful for the evening; although Tavy doesn't need it."

"That's pretty of you." Mrs. Stuart smiled with pleasure. "However, I don't believe Tavy will need it to-night."

Again that infinitesimal flicker of the lashes. A clumsy river steamer was churning down stream, a broad, glistening white blot on the water, and Geraldine watched its slow progress as interestedly as if it were laden with a life-time of pleasure for her.

"How much stronger you are looking than when I first met you, Mrs. Stuart. The air seems wonderfully good up here."

"I don't think it's air so much as just solid happiness," returned Mrs. Stuart, and her gaze strayed to the huge basket of white lilacs which hung in the bay window.

A little twitch in the trimly gloved wrist of

Geraldine, where it lay on the arm of the chair. She knew that type of basket. One of Billy's tricks. There was an ornate box of candy on the table. Geraldine knew every piece in it; a Billy special. That particular assortment was known in the crowd. His imagination did not run to variations in candy. Billy! Billy! Billy! There were evidences of him everywhere! The hand on the arm of the chair contracted. Up the river —

“Hello, Geraldine! I didn't know you were here.” Tavy; in a quaint, stiff little pompadour taffeta. She was beautiful; stunningly beautiful, with her exquisitely tinted complexion, and her glowing dark eyes, and her dancing black curls. There was a new sparkle about her to-day, a new vivacity. It was as if the sly little imps had slipped out from those glossy ringlets, and turning demure, had taken complete possession of her, glinting and glimmering everywhere, from the pointed toes of her little patent leather slippers, from . . . There was a sudden flash like crimson fire, as Tavy reached forward her hands in greeting, and it was then that Geraldine saw the ring; Billy's ring!

“How sweet you look!” exclaimed Geraldine, rising to take the outstretched hands, and she kissed Tavy impulsively. She spoke with exaggerated

animation, and her voice was just the slightest degree sharper and higher in pitch than usual. "I want to take you for a drive. Will you come?"

"Indeed I will." Tavy's voice is more animated, too, but it is not a shade sharper or higher in tone. If anything it is softer and sweeter. A great happiness has come to Tavy, and it has made her better in every way, as happiness must, for only they can be happy who are made better by it.

Tavy sat in the bay between her mother and Geraldine, and inspected the new rose silk with frank admiration.

"The country must be wonderful now, with all the trees in blossom," she observed, but that the country was not strong in her mind was evidenced by the fact that, in spite of herself, her eyes strayed to the sparkling diamond on her finger. For the past two hours she had been practicing at not being over-conscious of it.

Mrs. Stuart's eyes strayed to the ring, in spite of herself. It was such a beautiful stone, so clear, so alive with a thousand iridescences.

Geraldine's eyes strayed to the ring. There was no avoiding the thing! It filled the room! Its radiance blotted out the possibility of viewing anything else; its radiance and its illuminative significance! Geraldine laughed, and, reaching

over, touched the glittering solitaire, then she shook her finger playfully at Tavy.

"Confess!" she demanded.

Tavy blushed furiously. Her mother laughed happily.

"There's no use trying to hide it, Tavy," she counselled.

"Billy!" charged Geraldine, and Tavy shyly dropped her eyes; but her head nodded, and every one of the little black curls danced.

"I knew you'd take our Billy away from us," chattered on Geraldine, with that queer little accentuation of pitch and tone in her voice. "Our crowd will never quite forgive you, but they won't blame Billy. I don't see how he could help himself."

"Have some candy," invited little Tavy demurely, but the imps were dancing in her violet eyes.

"A Billy special." Geraldine selected a confection. "This one has cocoanut in it, and that one pistache, and the big square one fruit cake. You're very much to be envied, Tavy. You'll have exactly this assortment of candy all your life."

Tavy merely smiled.

"Billy always knows how to please." If she

had suddenly made up her mind to vary Billy's candy selection, she kept that decision entirely to herself.

"Yes, he has excellent taste," agreed Geraldine instantly. "He went with father to help choose these sapphires for my birthday, and he added this little purse for his own gift. Isn't it neat?"

"Exquisite." Tavy took the purse, and examined it with all the appreciation which was expected of her. "I'll slip on my bonnet and be with you in a minute."

"Excuse me, please, Geraldine," begged Mrs. Stuart, and with a smile of hearty friendliness, she trotted out after her daughter. It was such a joy to expend on Tavy the dainty care she had exercised in the dressing of the gay little dolls.

So Billy had reached his goal at last! His fevered race was run, and now he could pause to hear the voices by the wayside. A young man in love is headstrong. There is no stopping him until he has reached his goal. Geraldine looked out upon the broad river, but the current of her thoughts ran deeper than the stream. Three months she had waited for Billy to become engaged to his Octavia Stuart. Tavy!

"If you're to marry Billy, you must become better acquainted with all his friends," Geraldine

chatted, as, with the primly bonneted and gowned Tavy by her side, she whirled up the Drive, and into the back road, and around the long, sweeping wooded curves, where the great gray castles of the modern barons have raised their stone turrets in frowning guardianship of the Hudson. "I must arrange parties for you, teas for you to meet all the girls, and dances for the boys."

That was an interesting conversation, the planning of all this brilliant incursion into social activity. The world seemed to have become very wide and beautiful since Billy had opened the door, and it was a flushed and excited little Tavy who came back to the enchanted apartments, quite soon after four-thirty, to take her beauty nap.

There was no more sleep, however, in the big dark eyes than there had been in Billy's the night before. Mrs. Stuart herself drew the blinds in the delf-like blue and white cretonne room, and covered her grown-up daughter to the chin with a fluffy blue and white coverlet, and tip-toed away; but she was called back before she had quite closed the door, and was hauled down on the edge of the bed, and was talked to most volubly for the full half-hour of the allotted nap time. There was so much to talk about, with all these gay parties coming on. She hoped that Billy's friends

would like her; and Mrs. Stuart smiled happily over that absurd trace of worry in Tavy's tone.

Now began the bustle and excitement of making ready for the theater. There was a brand new gown of black lace for Mummy Stuart, ordered in defiance of her wistful protest, and this was to be its very first wearing. For Tavy there was a pearl-white gown of soft chiffon, quite simply made, and needing no other adornment than the sloping shoulders, and the graceful neck, and the superbly beautiful head of Tavy herself. Such innocent pleasure she took in the picture of they two, one in black and one in white, with Billy between them so big and strong and handsome.

Now they had to stop and bother with dinner. And now they were in the full drive and flurry and hubbub of dressing. And now they were all ready, gloves in hand, full twenty minutes before the time, and looking at the tiny Dresden clock on the mantel every three minutes, and gazing down out of the bay window to see what machines were stopping at the door.

Now it was seven-thirty, the time Billy had said he would call! And now it was seven-thirty-five. Tavy, sparkling quite enough to make up for the beautiful diamond she was concealing, began to draw on her gloves. The tiny Dresden clock was

probably fast. Mrs. Stuart was sitting with that smiling patience in her eyes, her hands folded loosely in her lap. She already wore her gloves. She was very handsome indeed, in her black lace gown and her gray hair, and her black cloak, with its touches of silver lace, lying on the chair beside her.

Seven-forty-five! Tavy was sitting perfectly still, with only an occasional jerky rock. Of course it was impossible always to be punctual to the minute. One shouldn't expect it in a city where the traffic is so frequently blocked; and besides, there is always a defective tire to consider. Tires were not made for schedule purposes.

Eight o'clock! What could be the matter! Billy has never been late before. Mrs. Stuart sits in quiet patience, but Tavy is walking the floor, and running to the window, and watching the clock, and sitting down, to keep sweet and unflurried.

Eight-fifteen! Eight-thirty! Wild visions of dreadful accidents pop through Tavy's head, one after another. Something terrible has surely happened! She sees Billy maimed and mangled in a dozen different ways; she sees him hauled out from the wreckage of his car; she sees him lying dead on the pavement, unidentified; she sees everything, each flashing vision more terrifying than the last!

She is half frantic. She wants to call up the police. She listens for the shrill cries of newsboys in the street. There may have been some awful disaster!

Nine o'clock! It is maddening to be a woman, and helpless, and given only the privilege of waiting!

Nine-ten! The enchanted elevator stops with a click outside in the hall. Before the bell can ring, Tavy has hurried to the door and has swung it wide open, and there, at last, stands Billy, at the entrance to the enchanted parlor!

Billy is not in his dress clothes. He is in a gray business suit, and his face is red and his hair tousled. His eyes are bleared and glistening, and there is a foolish grin on his face.

"Guess I'm a little late," mumbles Billy with hearty good-fellowship, but with a thick tongue. "Broke away at last, and I'm here."

The silence in the poor little enchanted pink and gray parlor is appalling! Tavy stands some distance back from the door, stiff and motionless, her big eyes staring, and every trace of the delicate tinting gone from her delicate cheeks. There is a moan and a sob from Mrs. Stuart, as she realizes the truth. Billy is drunk!



"Guess I'm a little late," mumbles Billy. There is a moan and a sob from Mrs. Stuart as she realizes the truth. Billy was drunk!

CHAPTER XVII

TAVY IS TO BLAME

THE blackness of despair never settled down on any woman with more deadening and crushing weight than it did on Jean Stuart. Once more this ghastly spectre of drunkenness had stalked into her life! In that moment, all the health and strength and happiness which had gradually come to her since the day when Billy knocked at their door in Vanheuster Square, were swept away, and left her weak, bitter, and ashen-gray of cheek and lip. For that moment she sat stunned, then had come the moan. Billy, stopped on the threshold by some dawning sense that the good-fellowship of his relations in the enchanted parlor had been disturbed, now felt that it was time for him to step forward and make things right, but that movement brought Jean Stuart to activity. She sprang from her chair and advanced to meet him, and there was that horror in her distended eyes which startled even

the fuddled Billy, grinning ingratiatingly though he was, into sudden seriousness.

She wasted no words on him. She put her hand upon his arm, and pushed him towards the door. There was no physical force in her touch, only the tense will behind it; and Billy, stricken into mumbling confusion, swayed out. The door closed on him. Swiftly Jean Stuart turned to the still staring Tavy, and held out her hand. The girl, lost in stupefaction, did not comprehend, and her mother caught hold of the ring. For an instant the finger automatically closed and stiffened, then she relaxed it to limpness. Jean drew off the ring. She hurried outside. Billy still stood there, numbly trying to frame within himself some way out of this unexpected check to his happiness. He tried to say something, but Tavy's mother thrust the ring in his hand, and hurrying inside the door, closed and locked it.

Billy Lane gazed down at the ring in sodden wretchedness, and suddenly, out of the depths of his misery, came sobriety! It seemed unbelievable, this hideous thing which had happened to him! He slowly recalled the steps by which he had arrived at this disaster. He had not been so far gone that he could not remember. He had dropped in at the club for just a minute to order

his tickets for the theater. Sam Langster had been there, Jack Reeves, Bert Hasselton. They had spread the news throughout the club that Billy Lane was engaged. They had thronged around him with congratulations.

Billy was very popular. Everybody liked Billy, because of his exuberance, his buoyant enthusiasm, his unfailing good-fellowship. They had wished him well! They had wished him a long life and a merry one; they had drunk to his eternal happiness. More of the fellows had come, shoals of them. Billy had never been so happy in his life. This was the greatest day in all his years! He had secured, to be his wife, the best, and the sweetest, and the most beautiful girl in all the world, the girl whom he meant to shield and protect from every pain, from every sorrow, from every harsh wind, so long as their lives should last! All day he had been in a state of exaltation which in itself was akin to intoxication, and now that exaltation had been raised to its enth degree by all his effervescent friends. Only Tommy Tinkle had been absent, and Billy had waited for him, just a few minutes, and had drunk again and again in response to all those friendly toasts. He had not for one minute forgotten that he had an engagement with the Stuarts! He had finally torn himself away from

the jolly company, though not without some rudeness, and, when he was outside in the air, he had congratulated himself aloud on having gotten away. He must be a little late. There'd probably be no time to dress. He had looked at his watch, swaying with blinking eyes. It had been difficult for him to properly focus his gaze. His watch couldn't be right! He had stumbled into his car; and here he was, with the ring in his hand, Tavy's ring, and the door closed against him, and, inside, some one sobbing! He rang the bell; he knocked on the door; but no one came!

Yes, some one was sobbing. It was Tavy! She was young. She could still sob, she could still shed tears, she could still bury her head upon a loving shoulder and find comfort there.

For a long, long time, Jean Stuart sat on the couch and held her daughter in her arms, held her there until after she heard the shuffling footsteps in the hall move away, and the elevator stop, and shoot downward; held her there until the mist of the night came in chill at the open window. She felt the chill upon her flesh, but it was nothing to the icy clutch which had fastened upon her heart!

She kissed the tear-stained face, at last, and rose, quietly, firmly, steadily. She helped Tavy to her feet, and, with an arm around her, drew her to-

ward the dainty little delf and white room. There were the pretty dresses to take off, and all the pretty finery to put away, and many, many things to lock, far, far from sight, in the hidden recesses of a heart which was already crowded with the useless lumber of broken hopes and shattered dreams.

But what of Tavy? From her stupefaction she had awakened to a frantic sense of humiliation. How could Billy have put this shame upon her! He had covered her with disgrace before her mother, before herself, before him! It had been much as if her fresh and pretty gown of delicate chiffon had been suddenly drenched in a muddy stream. That blow to her pride was one from which she would never quite recover. That first disillusionment had taken from her forever some of her delicacy, it had thrust her rudely into the most loathsome sordidness of life, and she would never again have quite her same degree of self-respect. How could he have done this thing to her! She would never forget that brutish distortion of his face, that swinish animal which had stood swaying before her in so gross a caricature of Billy! How dared he! Resentment rose fast in her and became anger. She was furious with him! She loathed him! She de-

spised herself for ever having turned to one of such bestial capabilities a pure and worshipful adoration! Why, she had looked upon him as some wondrous being only one step lower than the archangels, a perfect and flawless creature of splendid grandeur! She laughed bitterly. How foolish she had been not to have seen through him to this creature of base clay! It had not seemed possible that there could be anything but good in him. Oh, why had he destroyed her ideals! Why! She had been so happy, so proud in his love, and in her own! It had seemed so wonderful to nestle there in his arms, in that quiet moment after their first transports, and look forward into the heaven of the future to where they two should walk, constantly side by side, toward a rosy sunset of perfect peace and happiness; and now it was gone, all, all gone, and there remained nothing but blackness!

It was then that the pent-up misery broke within her, and the tears welled up to her eyes and the sobs to her throat, and she felt about her the comforting arms of the mother who had not found any word, amid all the bitterness of her crushed heart, to speak her own mortal hurt or give one crumb of comfort.

Amid that storm of distress there came the in-

sistently recurring question in Tavy's mind; why, oh, why? How could this disaster have fallen on her! What had she done to deserve it? Why could not Billy have escaped this terrible deed? She could scarcely believe now that he had done it. It was all so unreal. It was not like him! There must have been some cause, for Billy would never have done this of his own volition. No sane human being could will himself to descend to this hideous fall from his god-head. Perhaps he had been ill. That must be it! There could be no other explanation, unless she chose to think of Billy as one of deliberately besotted tendencies, who preferred to sink himself in gluttony. That thought was absurd. Billy had never voluntarily put himself in this condition, and if it had come upon him involuntarily, he was more to be pitied than blamed.

That was a startling thought! One which dried her tears and stopped her sobs. If Billy had been unfortunate, if this affliction had been brought upon him against his will, he had needed her sympathy, her comfort, even her aid. And what had she done! She had let him go without a protest, she, who had sworn herself to him, as sincerely and as whole-heartedly and as sacredly as she would upon the day when they would kneel

at the altar and ask the blessing of God upon their union! She had stood supinely, and allowed to be removed from her finger the symbol by which she had bound herself to him, in love, and truth, and eternal fidelity! In his hour of direst need, she had been traitorous to Billy; and now she heaped self-reproach after self-reproach upon her own head. She did not blame her mother. She was just in this new agony. Her mother's instinct of protection, that same instinct which had shielded Tavy so tenderly, and yet so vigorously, through all these years, had led her to guard her daughter promptly and decisively from this new menace; but her mother had not known. She, like Tavy, had been stunned by this unexpected apparition of poor Billy. The only guilty one was Tavy! She had permitted the ring to be taken from her finger. She had allowed Billy, her Billy, whom she loved with all her heart and with all her life, to be sent away alone, into the night — Where?

“Mother, I've been wrong! I want Billy! We must find him!”

Jean Stuart looked at her daughter pityingly. She had held her tongue through all this time, knowing, out of the ashes of her own buried past, that Tavy must fight this first battle by herself.

Silently she had followed, step by step, through all the mazes of Tavy's reasoning and her emotion, and she had been prepared, for the heart of Tavy had been her heart, for this conclusion.

"I hope you may never see him again," she said. They had silently been putting away their piteously wasted fineries, but now she drew Tavy into a chair and sat before her. "Tavy dear, the time has come when I must myself deal you a blow which I had hoped always to spare you. If I did not know what I know, I would say, too, that we should find Billy, and take care of him, and save him from ever again falling a victim to that loathsome disease which gripped him to-night; but no young man who could, under any circumstances, arrive at the state in which Billy presented himself here, is worth the appalling danger of saving. He is not worth the absolute sacrifice of any beautiful young girl's entire life."

Tavy half rose. She made a move as if to speak, but her mother silenced her with a gesture. Jean Stuart's face had lost every trace of its healthful hue, and there was a greenish cast beneath its gray. Bitter lines, erased by fifteen years of patient sweetness, had sprung out of their old hiding-places around her nose and mouth, and into her eyes had come that spiritual deadness which fol-

lows the ruthless mangling and crushing of the soul. It was a face the commands of which were carried out by awe; and Tavy sat back in her chair, with a vague horror of something worse to come creeping into her mind.

“Tavy dear, I am going to destroy, because I must, a pride which I have fostered in you for fifteen years. I am going to destroy the noblest ideal of your life, up to this time. I am going to strip the veil of hero worship from the name you most revere. I am going to tell you the story of a drunkard. I do not know if he is living or dead, but I loved him as you love Billy, and I shall still love him when I die; and that drunkard was Harrison Stuart, your father!”

CHAPTER XVIII

GERALDINE, THE COMFORTER

THE round moon slipped down out of the sky and sank behind the Jersey hills, and with its disappearance came blackness, except for that faint, vague trace of glow in the western horizon. Up from the sleeping city there came now the plodding and the rumble of the very earliest stirring of drowsy life; huge, dim wagons drawn by stolid thick-necked, heavy-rumped, big-footed horses; a lonely elevated train rattled and clattered in the distance with sharp clearness, and presently another, the intervals between them growing less as the darkness deepened. A far-off clock chimed the hour, a policeman's shrill whistle, the sound of running feet, silence again; then long, slow, dragging minutes. In the east a faint radiance began to appear, not a streak of light, but a lesser blackness, and with its coming, the bent figure in the window straightened and sighed. The standing figure, at the window in the other end of the lounging-room, moved.

"Hadn't you better go to bed, sir?" Burke, extraordinary tall and spectrelike in his heavy striped robe.

"No, I think not." John Doe, his voice quiet, full of patience. "The nights are still a little chilly, Burke."

"Yes, sir." The hint was enough. Burke touched a match to the paper and kindlings in the big fireplace, and, as the flames leaped up, the first light since midnight came into the big lounging-room, and revealed the old man as still dressed, from pumps to white tie, just as he had been when he came in from the theater. It had been a very dull show, and the folding opera glasses still lay on the table. They had not been used. Box A had been empty!

Burke looked at his watch, then he went into the pantry. Presently he came back with a tray, and stopped at the mantel. He set up a glass of the green liquid, and stood and looked at it a moment, then he crossed to John Doe with his tray.

"I thought you might like a cup of hot coffee, sir."

"Thank you." The old man drew a tabourette beside him, but his eyes were fixed on the glass of green liquid on the mantel. Neither of them said anything more. Burke set the tray on

the tabourette, and went back to his post at the window in the far end of the room, leaning, in tall ease, against the casing, and gazing somberly down into the street, with its long perspective of lonely lights.

The dawn was advancing now; there was a dull red streak in the east, almost sullen in its heaviness; there was a mist in the air. It would be a gloomy day. John Doe sipped at his coffee in silence.

There was the click of a key in the latch. Burke straightened instantly and turned. John Doe set down his coffee. The door swung open, and Billy stood, for a moment, framed against the dim light of the hall. His hair was matted upon his forehead with the dampness of the night, his cravat was awry, his face was haggard, but his eyes, though there was a hollowness about them, were clear and steady, and his mouth was firm. He swayed as he stepped into the room and closed the door behind him, but it was from weariness.

He walked across to the table, and, as Burke strode forward to meet him, he handed over his hat and gloves, and let Burke divest him of his top-coat.

"You haven't been sitting up all night, Hal?" His voice was husky, and there was a deadness in

it which fitted with the deadness of his eyes. He reached for a cigarette. The decanter was in front of the matches, and he moved it to one side.

"Yes, I couldn't sleep. I turned out the lights and went into the bedroom, but I came back." He had risen from his chair, and stood gazing at Billy in wonder, a half light of joyous hope in his face. "You didn't go to the theater."

"No," and a spasm of pain crossed Billy's features, as the sudden realization smote him that he had forced a night of misery on Hal, as well as on Hal's wife and daughter. He lit his cigarette and glanced at Burke. That handy man, broadly delighted, took his glass of green liquid from the mantel, and left the room with a light footstep, every tousled red hair on his head alive with his gratification. Billy was sober; cold sober!

Billy rose, and walked slowly over to the mantel and leaned upon it, staring down into the fire, the old man studying him in anxious silence.

"It's all off, Hal," he said, in the even, dead tone which had come out of his night of miserable wandering. His hand hung limply by his side. "I went up to the house to-night — drunk!"

"Billy!"

The hand closed stiffly, and then it opened again.

He compressed his lips and compelled himself to steadiness. There had been no reproach in the old man's voice. Billy had been prepared for reproach, prepared to accept it for his just due; but he had not been prepared for that tone of pity.

"I went up there after nine o'clock," he went numbly on. "I stood in the doorway, drunk. They were all dressed for the theater. Tavy's mother gave me back the ring; then she closed the door."

"Jean! Jean!" The cry burst from the old man's lips as if he had been seared by sudden fire. Again Jean had met her grizzly enemy face to face, again she had been pursued and tortured by that ghastly demon which had wrecked and embittered her life! His whole thought, in that first realization of the picture, was for her. Then for Tavy, his little Tavy, with the big glowing eyes and the glossy black curls. Even to her this hideous monster must show its loathsome face!

"She was dressed in white, pure white," went on Billy, in that monotonously inflexible voice; "just soft and clinging white, with no adornment around her beautiful white neck. I had selected a string of pearls which I had intended to give her for a wedding present." Again he closed and opened the hand which hung at his side. "Her

black curls were caught in with a band of lilies of the valley."

"And Jean?" Even now Hal dwelt with eager hunger on the visualization of her, on anything which would bring a new picture of her to his mind.

"All in black, Hal. She was very beautiful."

There was a long, long silence between them, then, with a sigh, Billy went into his own room.

There were days like this, days of numb suffering, in which neither man talked much. The blight which had fallen upon them all was too big and too devastating for words to ease. Billy rose early, and worked hard, and spent his nights at home with Hal and Tommy; silent evenings given over to fits of brooding and to stolid application. Hal was revising the proofs on the new book, and Billy brought home, each night, some drawing on which he could toil when the moment came in which he must not think. Tommy, voting them both deadly bores, merely sat, the most of the time. Billy had made no attempt to see Tavy, he had made no effort at futile apology, he had written no despairing letters to be returned, and, day by day, dull despondency settled upon him, until the need of comfort, more than Tommy could

give, became desperately imperative. It was then that he went to see Geraldine.

What a blessing it was to have a good, steadfast friend like Geraldine! She greeted Billy with all the old gaiety, and all the old, frank fondness, and she listened in sympathetic patience to his tale of abject misery. When he had finished, she laughed; and he had not seen in her eyes, nor did he see now the glitter of her satisfaction and the dreaminess of her speculation. He could not divine how eagerly she had waited for this moment, longed for the opening. She had known positively that it would come!

"It isn't a tragedy, Billy," she heartily assured him. "Tavy's too sweet a girl to hold out against you for so slight an offense."

"Slight!" Billy was horrified. "Why, I don't believe you realize yet, Geraldine, what I did!"

"Why not? You did the same thing here."

Billy knotted his brows. It was the same, wasn't it? Exactly. Only somehow it seemed vastly different. Not being able to express the difference, he gave it up.

"You don't know the circumstances," he soberly told her. "There are reasons why Mrs. Stuart will never forgive me."

"Yes, she will," and Geraldine's voice was most soothing. "Besides, Tavy is the one to be considered. If she cares as much for you as she should she'll send for you one of these days."

"Do you think so!" There was such intense eagerness in his voice that Geraldine, with difficulty, repressed a frown.

"Certainly," she replied promptly. "If she doesn't, Billy, she isn't worth breaking your heart over. And, if she doesn't, you can come right back to your old friends. We'll stick by you no matter what you do. Do you remember how quickly we forgave you after the morning you and Tommy wanted me to breakfast at old Christian's?" She laughed lightly, and then, with sudden seriousness, she leaned forward. They were sitting in the conservatory, with a big green palm spreading back of her, just where one of the fan-like leaves made a crown for her hair of golden brown. "My conscience has always hurt me about that morning, Billy. I was very wrong to have sent you away. I should have had you stay to breakfast. I was bad!"

She was very lovely as she lifted her soft eyes to his. There was a pretty flush on her smooth, round cheeks, and her hand, as she laid it upon his

in her earnestness, was tender and warm. He caught it, and held it in gratitude.

"You were a brick, Geraldine!" and he drew her arm within his own as he sat on the bench beside her. "I never blamed you for turning me loose that way. I'm not fit for any nice girl. I'm a worm!"

"You're no such thing!" she indignantly denied. "You're a dear old Billy; and, while I don't like to criticize Tavy, I do really think she was as bad as I. She should have taken you in that night, and helped you, and given you a good scolding, and made you promise to behave. Why, goodness, Billy, every live young man passes through that stage! Tavy has no right to make a world-without-end tragedy of it!"

She touched the wrong chord there, for Billy broke loose again. Tavy was the most wonderful creature in the world, the most adorable, the most desirable; and, for a solid half hour, Geraldine was compelled to listen to a minute dissection of Tavy's charms, and abilities, and sweetness, and general, all-round super-perfection. It would have been monotonous to almost any one, but Geraldine stood it with exceptional fortitude, and she wound up her trial as sweetly as she had begun.

"You poor Billy!" she sympathized. "I won't have you miserable like this. I'll see Tavy to-morrow afternoon, and, if you'll come here for dinner, I'll tell you all about it."

"You're a good fellow, Geraldine!" and there was a gulp in Billy's voice, as he patted her plump hand. "You bet I'll be here to dinner!"

CHAPTER XIX

TAVY TAKES A MUSIC LESSON

GERALDINE BENNING, mauve to-day from bonnet to slippers, was gushingly delighted to see her dear friend Tavy, and she said so with many little nods of the mauve plumes.

"And, frankly, I've brought you out here in the park to scold you," she concluded, turning slowly into the beautiful curves of the West Drive.

Tavy smiled wistfully, which was easy to do, since there was so much wistfulness in the big dark gray eyes.

"I don't mind. It will be rather a novelty. What is the scolding to be about?"

"Billy," and Geraldine cast a quick little side-long glance to see the effect of the simple word. What she saw made the tips of the mauve plumes jerk, for there was an instant piteous twitch at the corner of the exquisitely curved lips, and the big dark eyes contracted sharply. They glistened as if with moisture.

"You know, then." No concealment in the voice, no attempt to hide that there had been bitter suffering; and no parade of it. The mauve plumes jerked again.

"Of course." A contented little laugh. "Dear old Billy came straight to me. He's been telling me his troubles ever since we were kiddies together." If that bit of information had been intended to bring another twitch to the lips of Tavy, it was two-edged; for Geraldine herself winced somewhat in the telling. "He's dreadfully unhappy."

"We all are," acknowledged Tavy. "I don't think mother will ever quite get over it."

"Why not?" The tone of Geraldine was sharp. "One would think Billy had committed some terrible crime, in place of merely having had an accident. He's a good Billy, and I consider that he's been abused."

That was better. A little flush crept into the cheeks of Tavy, and the dark eyes began to glow. It was not unpleasant to hear Billy defended, in fact, he needed defense; but it was Tavy who should be doing it, not the girl to whom he had run with all his troubles.

"I am sure that Billy does not believe that he was abused."

The plumes nodded, as if they laughed. "Not Billy. He blames himself for everything. He was contrite in just the same way, after he came to our house one time in the same condition. Of course I was furious, but I forgave him two days afterwards. I don't think an unfortunate weakness like that should be held against any one."

Tavy was thoughtful, too thoughtful to answer, too thoughtful to enjoy, or even to notice, the tender green leaves which waved down upon the shining little coupé; and she smoothed and smoothed at the seam in her mouse-colored frock, the color of which brought out her pallor and her wistfulness and her pathos, qualities over which the mauve plumes nodded with savage little bobs. So this was not the first time for Billy. Could it be possible that Tavy's mother was right, that Billy was one of those who are doomed to bear this curse through life; and she shuddered as she thought of the pitiful revelation concerning her father. Tavy had seen with her own eyes what this weakness had done to the Stuart family, and it was far too serious a matter for light talk. She stole a look at the healthy cheeks, the scarlet lips and the clear brow of Geraldine. What could this girl know of sorrow or tragedy; what could she know of deep heart hurt? She was Billy's

friend, the one to whom he went with all his troubles, ever since they were kiddies together! Tavy's lips compressed, as she stifled something in her which jumped and hurt.

"People like Billy need sympathy," went on Geraldine, as soon as she saw that compression of the lips, and she studied little Tavy, from black curls to gray slippers, with curious satisfaction. "His friends love him in spite of his affliction. They know that the poor boy is likely to have that happen to him at any time, but there is so much good in him that he simply must be forgiven."

Very still sat Tavy, smoothing and smoothing at the seam of the little gray frock with her tiny thumb. So, all Billy's friends knew of his weakness, and that it was chronic, and that it was likely to occur again and again, and that he must be forgiven and forgiven, and that after each forgiveness he was likely to come to the door, at the most unexpected times, with that something in him which was not Billy, leering its red leer and snarling its red snarl out of a cruelly distorted and disennobled countenance. Could Tavy's mother ever endure that again? Why, for years before Tavy had come into the world, and after, Jean Stuart had lived in the hourly dread that this awful thing

was to happen again. She never saw her husband leave the house that she did not live in an agony of fear until she looked in his eyes and saw them clean. No, it must never happen again, never! Deeper and deeper Tavy buried her heart beneath the ashes of her once joyous hopes, and the mouse-gray of her gown crept up and blended with the delicate tint of her cheeks and obliterated it; while the gay mauve plumes nodded and nodded. Oh! Geraldine was talking again. What was she saying?

“So I’ll just bring Billy up some evening, and pop him in at the door.”

Tavy’s heart gave a leap. It was not yet deeply enough buried; so brave little Tavy compressed her lips, and heaped more ashes upon it, more and more, working quite frantically, as if in terror that it might burst through the ashes before she had heaped on enough. To have Billy pop through the door! It was a startling thought, and no wonder her heart had leaped. She could see him standing there, not as he had stood on that awful night, but big and handsome, strong and yet tender, with the love light in his eyes, and — more ashes, little Tavy, more ashes, quickly. The lips compressed, and the little hand which had been

smoothing the mouse-colored seam, fluttered up and pressed upon the bosom for an instant; and the mauve plumes nodded and bobbed.

"Grand tableau," Geraldine rattled on, "Billy pops in, I pop out, tears, reconciliation, the fatted calf. He'll be at our house for dinner to-night. I'll bring him up."

"No." All buried now, buried away down deep, and the voice was even and firm. What wonderful patience and capacity for suffering had these women of Jean Stuart's strain! It was bred in them; they had need of it, God help them!

"Some other night then," Geraldine cheerfully urged. "You're bound to have him sooner or later, because Billy is irresistible; and the Billy habit grows on one. I couldn't do without Billy if I wanted to." The mauve plumes should have been clipped. "Well, wait until some night next week."

"Please don't, Geraldine." Because Tavy's heart was buried was no reason why her susceptibility to pain should be gone, and in her voice was a piteous intonation, which anything but a mauve plume would have respected. "You mustn't think of it. I know you mean well, but Billy can't come."

"I'm so sorry!" cooed Geraldine. "Billy will

be broken-hearted when I tell him to-night that his good Samaritan failed."

Thereupon Billy's good Samaritan dropped the entire subject, and chatted away about frills and furbelows, and dances and theaters, and all such agreeable topics, until it came time to take Tavy home, with a splitting headache.

At dinner time, the mauve plumes tucked away with Geraldine's other familiars, Billy's good Samaritan appeared before him radiant with sympathy, if such a thing could be, and cheerful with condolence. To relieve her ill tidings from any trace of sombreness, she had arrayed herself most thoughtfully in a shimmering dinner-gown of canary, which turned the golden brown of her hair to burnished copper. An airy butterfly of black gauze peeped its spreading wings from behind her shoulders, and its foolish long black tail floated delicately down around her, clinging as if in caress. Her cheeks were fresh and her eyes were sparkling as she swept in, like a vision of sun glow, to greet Billy in his favorite nook in the billiard-room; but a trace of the sparkle left her eyes as Billy advanced eagerly to meet her. He did not notice the sunburst effect at all! He had no heed for the black butterfly, nor the burnished copper hair, nor the fresh cheeks, nor even the sparkling eyes.

"Did you see her!" he asked.

"Tavy, you mean?" she laughed. "I had her out for a drive, Billy."

"How is she? How did she look?"

"Pretty well, I should say." Geraldine considered the matter critically, with a pretty little pucker of concentration in lips and brow. "Her hair was as black as ever, and she was quite able to laugh, when I told her about Tommy's absurd fancy-dress breakfast."

"Oh," observed Billy. He should have been delighted that Tavy had not worn herself to a shadow with grief, but there was a selfish pang of disappointment in the thought that she had laughed. "What did she say?"

Geraldine's face turned sweetly serious and her lashes drooped, as she took his hand and clasped her own over it.

"I don't like to tell you, Billy." Her voice was full of sympathetic modulation, low and gentle, and her brows twitched ever so slightly as she felt the wince in the big hand which lay in hers. She slipped her arm in his, and strolled with him towards the library.

"It's all off then, permanently," he guessed, and his voice was funereal in its dejection. "I am not to see her any more."

"I wouldn't give up all hope even yet." It was dim in the library, and the dark walls were half hidden in the glow of a low, wide-spreading, dull red lamp shade. She sat in one of the big leather couches, and drew Billy beside her. It was he who reached for her hand this time, and held to it.

"I did the best I could for you, Billy. I told her how sorry you were and how broken-hearted, and after I had pleaded with her, for half an hour, to forgive you, I asked for permission to bring you up; but she said, no, you could not come."

A sharp intake of the breath, and the hand which held Geraldine's closed with such convulsive strength that she almost cried out with pain.

"Poor little Tavy!" That was his first thought, and that was what the convulsive clutch of his hand had meant. Geraldine recognized it, and she felt her lips stiffen. She had at first interpreted that clutch as pain for himself.

"Poor little Tavy," she repeated. "Of course it hurt her, Billy. No girl likes to be humiliated; but, if I were you, I'd let the matter rest a week or two; then I'll go up again, if you wish, and make another attempt."

"Will you!" The tone was as eager as if it had been the first time she had proposed to go. He had no pride, none whatever!

"Of course I will, but I don't like to. Frankly, Billy, I had all I could do to keep from saying what I thought. I don't care for people who are unforgiving to my friends. Let's don't talk about it any more. Tell me about your business."

He was heavily plodding through the details of structural iron work, when Three-B Benning lounged into the library and shook hands heartily. There was no resentment in Three-B Benning that Billy had once made a fool of himself in this house, nor was there any either in Mrs. Benning when she presently joined them, rustling in her stiff silk, and beaming in motherly affection. Billy had not been with them much of late, and they missed him. How good it was to be among old friends, and what a jolly little home-like dinner party it was. Billy enjoyed it very much; but he left at half-past nine.

First of all, as soon as he reached the city, he took a spin down the Drive. The windows in the bay were lighted, but there was no one visible in them, though once a shadow crossed the curtains! The shadow lacked definition, so that he could not tell whether it was Tavy or Mrs. Stuart who had passed. He had never been able to tell, on any of the nights he had come up here!

Oh! if he could only see her, if he could only

stand at a distance and gaze on her, it would be something to ease this intense longing which was in his heart! If he only could arrange to have some one take her to the theater, so that he could have even Hal's hungry privilege of the opera glasses! Poor Hal. This treat was cut off from him, too, now. It was one more of the black consequences piled up on Billy's head.

He must see her! The lights went out in the bay window up there, and it might have soothed him some to know, though it would have hurt him, too, that, when Tavy went back into the delf and white room, she kneeled by her bed and bowed her head on her arms, and longed and longed for a sight of Billy as he longed for a sight of her! Ashes are a light covering with which to hide a heart, Tavy, and there are hearts which must still ache, no matter how deeply they are buried.

Morning. Three times a week, at ten-thirty, Tavy hurries off for her music lesson. Just across the Drive, at the corner where she takes the stage, are some steps leading down the bank. There is a sort of forlorn park there, with many steep little winding paths and innumerable steps to go up and go down, and feeble shrubbery, and a general air of making the best of things. Perhaps there is something in the very forlornness of the hillside

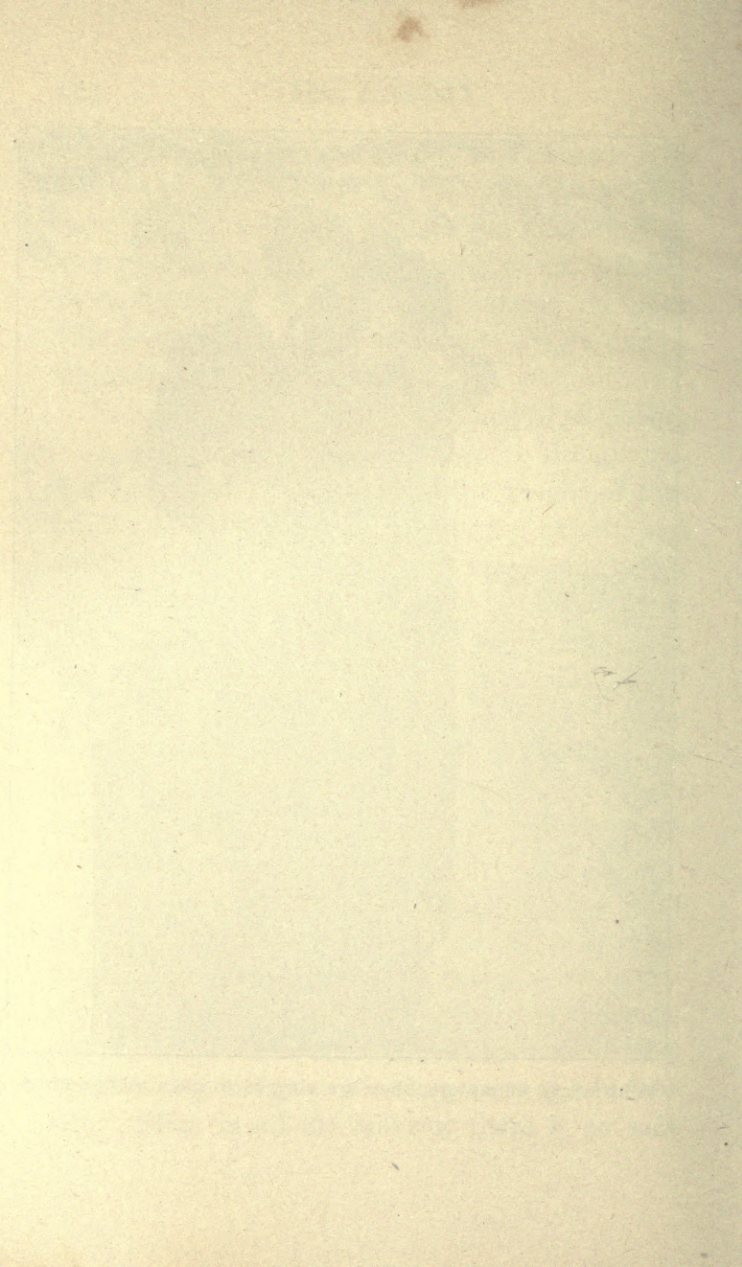
retreat which appeals to Tavy, and perhaps it is because she has so few opportunities to be quite alone with her endless task of ash heaping, but, whenever there is no stage in sight, she wanders down for a five minutes' stroll around the poor little fountain, and sometimes even sits on one of the starved looking benches.

To-day, she rounds the little clump of shrubbery toward the fountain, her eyes cast to the ground, and her thoughts sombre with the weight of that endless task which she has taken upon herself, and which she has begun to fear will never quite cease. It is a sombre day, too, with the sky grayly overcast and a gray mist in the air. Just on the other side of the shrubbery, near the fountain, is a tall young man gazing straight up through the branches. This is a splendid spot which he has found. Whenever he has a half hour to spend, he can look up at those windows, on the block beyond, without being conspicuous.

Suddenly, as Tavy rounds the corner, she looks up from the ground and the tall young man looks down from the windows, and the gray skies disappear, and all the world is flooded with radiance, and a certain heart scatters its ashes as if they were nothing, and goes pounding away at a furious rate. Why, in all the universe there is no such



With a cry of rapture, they are clasped in each other's arms.



thing as tragedy, or sorrow, or sombre thought; nothing but joy, music, youth, flaming color, love!

“Billy! Tavy!” The two words are simultaneous; they are exultant. For only a moment they stand and feast the eyes which had been so, so hungry, and then, with a cry of rapture, they are clasped in each other's arms, clasped close, as if nothing should ever part them again!

CHAPTER XX

A FRIENDLY CALL

THERE was a thrilling air of secrecy in Mike Dowd's Sink, and Mike, watching the four lone survivors of the winter conclave, lowered his yellow mustache in suspicion and contemplatively fingered his bungstarter. There was something doing, but the nature of it required such unusual preparations that Mike, in all his experience, could find nothing upon which to base a theory. For a week there had been furtive whisperings among Jerry-the-Limp, Piggy Marshall, Red Whitey and Tank Tonkey. This whispering might mean anything from a raid on a peanut stand to the murder of a friend. But what did it mean when Piggy Marshall, who had never been known to wear any other neck adornment than a blue gingham shirt with the top button open, suddenly produced from his pocket a tight little roll in clean yellow paper, and proceeded, with many painful jerks and much reddening of the face, to don a phenomenally low turn-down collar of

phenomenal whiteness, and a crisp little black and red bow tie, which was ready made and snapped on with a hook? What did it mean when Tank Tonkey, in like solemn manner, donned a like snow-white collar and attached a ready-made four-in-hand of violent blue? What did it mean when Jerry-the-Limp produced, from a flat parcel under his arm, a waiter's white dickey of glistening celluloid, and buttoned it under his vest, presenting, in the twinkling of an eye, a startling transformation from a poor, suffering, poverty-stricken cripple to a gentleman of means, in a spotless white shirt front and a substantial black bow tie? What did it mean when Red Whitey, decorated in a green tie, went back to the tap and washed his face?

"What have you guys turned up?" demanded Mike Dowd, his curiosity at last past bearing.

"Oh, nothin'." It was Jerry-the-Limp who gave this nonchalant reply; Jerry, who had adjusted every cravat and critically inspected it, who had turned up Piggy Marshall's trousers band, so that it did not lop in a ragged gray edged line over the top of his belt, who had sent Red Whitey shuffling sullenly back to wash his face a second time, with instructions to use soap and a brick or quit the party. Jerry, even now, was going nerv-

ously from one to the other of his forces, and ordering the adjustment of buttons.

"Here, you bum," Jerry commanded Piggy Marshall; "didn't I tell you to wet your hair when you combed it?"

"Nothin', eh!" growled Mike, viewing the resplendent quartette askance. "If you stiffs pull anything phoney around this corner and get the Chicago Buffet in bad, I'll pike you!"

"Aw, give that stuff the double bell, Mike," husked Piggy Marshall, lounging over against the bar and twisting his neck to a comfortable settling in his collar. "We're just goona call on a friend."

"Oh," and Mike's yellow mustache went up. "The Tombs or the Island?"

Tank Tonkey, his eyes bulging from the enforced position of his head, turned with the proper indignation of a respectable citizen, though to cast his scorn on Mike he was compelled to turn his entire body.

"Can't a guy have friends that never cracked a rock?" he demanded. "This friend o' ours ——"

"Shut your yawp, you fat slob!" suddenly blazed Jerry-the-Limp. "If I hear another rumble out of you, I'll cave in your hoops!" and he

shook a bony fist at the offending brother. "Red, ain't you got that map scraped yet?"

"You go to hell!" yelled the suffering Red Whitey from back at the tap. "I got soap in my eye!"

"You don't know how to use it," scorned Jerry. "Come on, or we'll drop you off the wagon. Two slugs and two scuttles, Mike," and, with the recklessly extravagant air which went with his celluloid shirt front and black bow tie, he counted a dime, a nickel and five pennies, on the bar.

Red Whitey, with one eye closed and his face rasped to the color of his beard, came hurrying forward, leaving a stream of profanity behind him, and seized his "scuttle of suds," the same being a glass of beer; and the four, in solemn line, drank their parting drinks, leaving Mike Dowd mystified to the point of whittling a ring around his mallet handle.

It was Jerry-the-Limp who led the way, striding along with an appearance of great briskness, which, however, made but little headway, with Piggy Marshall beside him and Red Whitey and Tank Tonkey following. They trudged up the Bowery, in the blighting shadow of the elevated tracks, and over to Broadway, and far up town, a procession with a sedate purpose and stolid de-

cision, their eyes popping and their faces reddening from the cramping of their stiff collars, but their destination fixed inexorably in their minds!

Past the wholesale district, past the dry goods section, past the hotel quarter, and up near the theater district, where at last they turned in, with the unbreathed ease of them who have traversed continents, at one of the old office buildings. Just before they entered the lobby, Jerry-the-Limp drew up his cohorts for a final word of instruction, while a near-by policeman wondered whether or not he should trouble himself.

"Now, look here, you boneheads, listen to me. When you drill into this dump, hold your heads up and don't look at the janitor. Just pass him right by, because if he ever catches your eye, he'll give you the run. Follow me, and throw a bluff you got business where you're goin'. Do you get me?"

"Shoot," rumbled Tank Tonkey, his chin elevated, and a ridge of white numbness coming in his neck where it bound against his collar.

"Damn soap!" snarled Red Whitey, rubbing his knuckle in his eye.

"Well, when we get where we're goin'," went on Jerry, "stick right close to me, and don't any

of you butt in unless I give you a stamp on the hoof. That's all. Now!"

With this word of command, General Jerry-the-Limp led his troops boldly into the lobby, and passed the elevator starter in unquestioned safety, and turned into the open car and lined up against the back wall in silent stiffness.

"Twelf!" shrilled General Jerry, as the car shot upward. Tank Tonkey was holding his huge middle with anxious care, and Red Whitey's knees were bent under him. Red had not ventured beyond the Bowery in years, and this was a foreign land. He wondered if the elevator boy had money, and would be good for a two gitney touch; but the motion was too swift for proper work.

"Now!" again said Jerry-the-Limp, as they emerged on the twelfth floor. It was a word of reassurance as well as command, for Red Whitey was already showing signs of weakening, and seemed unanxious to leave the elevator.

For only a moment General Jerry paused before the office door of William Lane, Engineering Architect, then he boldly opened and entered, and the snubnosed office boy, who still felt that hereditary instinct for rod and line and hook and worm,

was astounded to see confronting him the four most remarkable visitors who had ever infested that reception room. He was a city-bred boy, however, and he knew exactly what to do. He bristled straight up to the gate of the low railing, and barred the way of the entire four. He came about to Tank Tonkey's middle shirt button.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"Is Mr. Doe in?" The voice of Jerry-the-Limp, a wheedling voice, a voice intended to be suave, but which ended in a whine.

"What do you want?"

Red Whitey, catching the sweeping eye of the snubnosed boy on him, followed the line of the ceiling, as far as he could see it, in both directions, and then studiously inspected the rug. He was most uncomfortable. Jerry-the-Limp, however, was unruffled. He was sure of his ground.

"Just tell Mr. Doe it's some friends dropped in to call on him."

The boy was city-bred. He studied the four friends of Mr. Doe with frankly admiring incredulity, and then the snub nose seemed to spread, in sympathy with his suppressed grin.

"Cards, please," he requested.

Jerry-the-Limp, given much to impulsiveness, suddenly leaned forward and snarled in the boy's

face, and the boy stepped back, startled by that ghastly mask.

"The names'll do, you!" he shrilled. "You tell Doe it's Jerry-the-Limp! He'll be right out!"

For a moment the boy stood, stunned, and then, looking backwards at the friendly callers, with their shiny buttons and their frowsy crumpled clothing, and their startlingly contrasting collars and cravats, he went into the office of John Doe, where he found Billy's partner bending, with pleasant absorption, over an intricate roof drawing. He had a fine problem here to solve, a delicate, complicated problem, where safety and grace must be combined.

"Out with it, Major." He smiled down with good comradeship.

"Some callers for you, Mr. Doe. I didn't tell 'em you was in. One of 'em says his name is Jerry-the-Limp." The boy saw the face of John Doe turn deathly pale, he saw his lean hands grip the edge of his drawing-board, he saw the eyes half close; then he saw the head come up, and John Doe was smiling down at him again.

"Jerry-the-Limp, eh?" He spoke slowly, and as if his tongue were slightly thickened, but he smiled. "Well, show them in, Major," then,

as the door closed, he reached for a glass of water, and stood gathering himself for the indignity.

"Hello, Bow-Wow!" hailed Jerry-the-Limp cheerily, as he came into the little private office.

John Doe stood silently until the four had clustered into the room.

"You will not use that name here," he said quietly. "Now, why have you come?"

"Just a friendly little call, Pal," and Jerry-the-Limp grinned confidently up at him. "We thought you'd like to see some of your old buddies from down at the Sink."

"You came for money, I suppose."

Tank Tonkey smiled pleasantly; Piggy Marshall chuckled in his throat; Red Whitey rubbed his knuckles in his eye, but his other eye looked pleased.

"Well, Brother," returned Jerry-the-Limp, still grinning his impudent grin, "I wouldn't have mentioned it myself, right off the bat this way, till we'd chatted a while about old times, but, if you want to help your old pals a little bit, why, we ain't too proud to accept assistance." Jerry ended with another grin, and just to show that he was at ease, he put one foot on a chair and leaned on his knee, whereat the bottom of his celluloid dickey popped out of his vest.

John Doe slowly paced the length of his little office; and Red Whitey, watching his erect carriage, his straightly poised head, his neatly cropped silver Vandyke, and the marked distinction of his face, tugged at Jerry-the-Limp's coat and huskily whispered.

"Are you sure he's the right guy?"

"Shut your yawp!" growled Jerry-the-Limp.
"He didn't deny it, did he?"

With sudden decision, Doe sat at his desk and leafed through his 'phone book, and called a number.

"Is this Mike Dowd?" he asked.

The effect of that simple question was magical! Tank Tonkey, who was never comfortable standing, leaned against the wall with a thump which jarred the pictures, and he held his middle; Piggy Marshall tried to stick his finger between his collar and his throat; Red Whitey half opened the door, so he could have quick egress if needed, and stood listening, with his face fish-white where it gleamed through his red whiskers; Jerry-the-Limp, with active concern on his weazened face, hurried over to the desk.

"For the love of Pete, whacha goona do, Bow-Wow!" he implored.

"Just a moment, Mr. Dowd." John Doe set

down the receiver, and turned on Jerry-the-Limp a face so full of command that the poor suffering cripple drew up his leg instinctively to limp. "I told you not to call me by that name," he said sternly. "You used it once before when I was in Mr. Dowd's saloon. I warn you not to utter the syllables again. Stand back there!"

Jerry-the-Limp, with a droop in his lips, turned to find the eyes of his cohorts glaring coldly upon him.

"Honest, Mr. Doe, if you turn us up to Mike ——"

Doe held up his hand, and Jerry-the-Limp, not quite knowing why, stopped.

"This is John Doe, Mr. Dowd," he said into the 'phone. "If you will remember when I was in your place not long ago, a man who pretended to be a cripple claimed acquaintance with me, under the name of Bow-Wow."

The four afternoon callers, huddled near the doorway in two groups, of three callers and one caller, heard a harsh voice crackling and snapping in the 'phone.

"Yes, they're here," returned Doe, with a smile. "I merely called you up, Mr. Dowd, to ask your advice as to what to do with them."

The answer of Mike Dowd was so short, so

clean-cut, and so vigorous, that every person in the room could hear it.

“ Kill 'em ! ”

A lot more came over the wire, not all the words were distinguishable and not all were printable, but enough could be gleaned, even by the caller nearest the door, whose red whiskers seemed to be curling tighter, to know that Mike Dowd promised to get Mr. Doe out of any consequences of his act if he killed them, or, if he didn't want to mess his hands with them, merely to send them down to the Sink, and Mike would do the job.

“ Thank you,” returned Mr. Doe, and hung up the receiver; then he faced his callers. “ Get out.”

The tone was not vociferous, it was not extraordinarily vigorous even, but there was such calm and firm decision about it that the callers got out; and, as they closed the door behind them, John Doe sunk limply on his desk, sprawled there, crushed, humiliated, shamed!

“ You're a fine fathead ! ” growled Piggy Marshall, as they jostled out through the reception-room. He was already taking off his collar, and tearing it in the process.

“ Didn't I tell you you didn't know the gent ? ” demanded Red Whitey, who was well in the lead.

The snub-nosed office boy was opening the outer door for them.

"For a handful of butts I'd croak you!" husked Tank Tonkey vindictively, as they clustered in front of the elevator. "You had a fine frame-up, didn't you? Oh, yes! We'd come up here — say, do you know what this outfit cost me?" and he shook the collar and the violent blue tie at Jerry-the-Limp. "Nineteen cents! Now you buy it!"

"Do you suppose I want to play circus?" snarled Jerry-the-Limp, looking at the white circle with aversion. "Ain't you sport enough to invest that much in a big gamble like this? Why, all we had to do ——"

"Yes, we did!" Tank Tonkey again. He was too heavy to give himself much to wrath, but when he did, it was deadly. "All we had to do was to smoke your hop, and think this millionaire sport was Bow-Wow, and we could milk him for the rest of our lives! Oh, yes, we did!" Tank Tonkey's rage was rising in proportion to his weight. "I'll lean on you, you shrimp!"

"Shut your yawps, you boneheads!" shrilly yelled Jerry-the-Limp, wheeling on his followers with fierce command, but he saw in their cold eyes that his moral force was shattered and his leader-

ship gone; and he had instant proof of it when Red Whitey, without a word of warning, suddenly pranced up and kicked him on the shin.

"Say!" growled Piggy Marshall; "don't any of these elevators stop on this floor!"

A messenger boy stepped up to the row of elevators and pressed a button, and the next car flashed its red light. It was fairly crowded, and, as they thronged in, Jerry-the-Limp found himself forced violently into the periphery of Tank Tonkey.

"Get out of me!" wheezed Tank, his voice made shrill by compression. "Step away or I'll bat you!"

"Paste him one for me, Tank!" requested Piggy Marshall.

"I will, so help me, the minute I get room to swing an arm!" and in Tank's reddened eyes there came a savage gleam. "Push back, I tell you!"

"Get off my foot!" Piggy Marshall. He, too, was losing his temper.

At that moment the elevator stopped at the main floor, and Jerry-the-Limp, feeling that the height of his unpopularity had arrived, popped out of the door, with a real limp. He might have gotten away clear, but the elevator starter, seeing him run, grabbed him by the coat. That was no way to de-

tain Jerry-the-Limp, for his arms were out of the sleeves in an instant, and, leaving the coat in the starter's hands, he darted through the lobby, in his blue shirt sleeves, with his celluloid dickey sticking straight out in front of him and his black bow tie slipped around under his ear. That second of delay, however, had been disastrous, for it enabled Red Whitey to catch him round the neck, at the curb, and, in two seconds more, Tank Tonkey and Piggy Marshall were upon him!

It took two policemen to drag Jerry-the-Limp from under his cohorts; and the last that admiring Broadway saw of General Jerry and his army, they were whizzing away in a patrol wagon, still snarling.

CHAPTER XXI

TOMMY TINKLE GOES A-PEDDLING

MRS. STUART smiled as she opened the door, for the young man who stood there, with a portfolio of sketches under his arm and a whimsical grin on his wide lips, was Tommy Tinkle.

"Any water-color drawings to-day, madam; any oil portraits to paint; any white-washing to do?"

"Step in, and I'll look around," invited Mrs. Stuart, very glad indeed that he had come, for smiling was rather rare, these days, in the Stuart apartments.

"Thank you." Tommy hung his hat on the hall tree in the vestibule, and lounged into the pink and gray parlor, and laid his portfolio on the table, picked him a chair in the bay window, and reached for his cigarette case. "A certain beautiful young lady is not at home, I suppose. Do you mind if I smoke? Foggy weather we're having."

"Tavy is at her music lesson, and you know you may smoke, and I think we shall have some rain, and won't you sit down." It was good to hear her laugh, although the mirth did not extend as far as her patient eyes.

Tommy drew Mrs. Stuart's chair into a more pleasant view for her, and waited until she had seated herself, and reached for his portfolio.

"I've been doing some serious portrait work," he observed. "How is this one?"

Mrs. Stuart gave a little gasp of delight.

"Tavy!" she cried. Tavy it was, glossy black hair, oval cheeks, slender, graceful neck, and, most marvelous of all, the dark gray eyes had within them a hint of their susceptibility to change through violet to blue! It was a happy Tavy who smiled up at Mrs. Stuart from the clean white page, but Tommy, with that fidelity which sees beneath, had caught the trace of inborn wistfulness in the eyes.

"Pretty fine, from memory and sketches," bragged Tommy, cocking his head on one side to admire his own work. "The Hudson River, Mrs. Stuart, flows down through the State of New York in an almost directly north and south line for the more important part of its course. On its broad bosom floats a wealth of commerce. The next

portrait is of a lady whom all must revere and admire, and whom to know is a privilege," and he turned the leaf, glancing nonchalantly at the ceiling. "Lady Stuart."

"You flatter with your brushes as well as with your tongue, I'm afraid," protested Mrs. Stuart, pleased nevertheless, for Tommy had limned her in one of those rarer moments, during her recent happiness, when she had redeveloped the mischief which accounted for some of the imps in Tavy's eyes.

"You speak but to charm," rattled on Tommy. "The shores of the many bays and inlets in the vicinity of New York are the most interestingly populated of any city in the world. Into New York Harbor come ships from every clime. This is Geraldine. I name her so that you may know for whom the portrait was intended, and so congratulate me. The next is the artist himself, painted in a period of repose and just on the point of smoking a cigarette with easy nonchalance. The Atlantic Ocean, Mrs. Stuart, is an extremely large body of water, and turning the page, you find yourself gazing on the manly features of Billy Lane. Handsome chap, isn't he? Mrs. Stuart, we have now arrived at the object of my visit." He handed her the last named portrait, and closed

the portfolio. "Now, tell me, what is your frank and unbiased opinion of Billy?"

She did not answer immediately, although she shot at him a swift and shrewd glance. There was much method in Tommy's madness, as she had long since divined. She studied the picture for a while in musing silence. It was an excellent portrait of Billy, at his best, wholesome, honest, handsome, good-natured Billy; and her heart went out to him, as it always had; but it went out to him now in sorrow and pity.

"I like Billy very much," she admitted, but the smile was gone from her face. "He has many noble qualities."

"I knew you'd say that," Tommy promptly rejoined. "Every one who knows him must say it. Why can't he come back, and promise to be good, and be forgiven?"

"Please don't, Tommy," begged Mrs. Stuart soberly. "From what you say, I judge that you know what happened here, and if you know, you already understand why Billy can never be the same to us."

"Probably not." He smiled at her with engaging frankness. "Billy didn't send me, but I know he wouldn't expect to be quite the same to you. He wouldn't ask a full restoration, but just

a crumb, just the privilege of coming up here once in a while and sitting around."

She shook her head sadly.

"It wouldn't do, Tommy. It couldn't be kept to that. You knew, of course, that Billy and Tavy were very fond of each other."

"I couldn't help knowing it," and the whimsical grin flashed on Tommy's face. "From the minute Billy met Tavy he made a nuisance of himself. If I asked him the time, he told me about Tavy's curls. If I said good-morning, he told me about her eyes. I've never seen a fellow so foolish about a girl. And now if you could see him, Mrs. Stuart, you'd pity the boy. He's all broken up, he's pale and hollow-eyed, he can't eat, he can't sleep, he can't do anything but just moon around and want to see Tavy. I'm serious, Mrs. Stuart. Billy's my best friend, and I'll admit that he needed a punishment. But he's had it. Give us a chance, won't you? Just let Billy and me come up here for five minutes at a time, and sit in a corner and say nothing, just look and go away. I'll even put blinkers on Billy, if you say so. I'll ——"

She stopped him with a smile of infinite sadness.

"What you say only makes me the firmer in

my determination. I'm sorry that he has suffered, but the mere fact that he thinks so much of Tavy makes it dangerous for him to come here. I would not torture her with a love she could not enjoy, nor permit her to marry a man who would be bound to make her unhappy."

Tommy stiffened a trifle.

"Billy would make no girl unhappy," he stoutly maintained. "His one weakness is his only fault, but I personally know that he has never tried to overcome it. He has never had occasion to do so until now. He has not taken a drink since the last time he came to your door. He's cured, and all he needs is a little encouragement."

Again she smiled and shook her head.

"I could not trust him. I have seen too much of what that weakness leads to. I have seen men stop drinking for brief periods, and sometimes quite long ones, but if they once have that craving they never are quite safe; never," and that old bitterness sprang into her eyes.

"That's just it!" Tommy's voice was triumphant. "Billy has no craving, and I'll swear to it. Here's what I propose. You may be making a serious mistake. If Tavy and Billy think so much of each other, and Billy is all right, you'd be very sorry you kept them apart. You

just let Billy come up here, now and then, and watch him. If he makes one more mistake, just one, turn him out. I'll help you. So will Billy." Adroit Tommy. He saw, as she glanced down again at the ingratiating picture of Billy, that there was no wavering in her, and he knew better than to compel a refusal which would be final. He went abruptly to the window. "What a queer government boat. Did you ever see one like it, Mrs. Stuart?" He pointed it out, a long, low craft with a myriad of angling derricks, which, at that distance, looked like toothpicks. He relieved her of the sketch, as she stood at the window. "Will you and Tavy go to the theater with me some night this week?"

Again she laughed at him. Tommy Tinkle was an irresistible cure for the blues, and her eyes softened as he stood looking down at her. She saw through Tommy. She saw mournfulness underneath his mockery. It was a quality she could easily distinguish because she was so thoroughly acquainted with it.

"You'll have to ask Tavy about that." Suddenly her eyes narrowed. "You're not arranging for us to meet any one?" The shocked look on his face was enough answer. "Pardon me, Tommy."

"I'm not damaged in the slightest," he lightly

assured her. "How soon will the certain beautiful young lady be home?"

"She should be here now," and Mrs. Stuart glanced at the clock.

"Then I'll wait," and Tommy strolled across to the piano. He had a habit of making himself perfectly at home everywhere he went. He had been known to call merely because he liked to sit in a certain chair and think. He opened the piano and ran his fingers over the keys. "I have decided Tavy and you need some excitement. You've been cooped up here too much since Billy went away. If you won't let him come back, I'll have to take you out myself."

He leafed over some music and pushed it aside, then he struck into a gay little composition of his own, a whimsical thing, full of unexpected turns, and ending with a crash which was humor itself caught into melody.

"You always seem happy," mused Mrs. Stuart, studying him curiously.

"It's about the only good thing I do," returned Tommy soberly. "I think I'll go home."

He had figured it all out. Before he left the room, he managed to slip the portrait of Billy under a sheet of music on the table. They'd find it there later.

CHAPTER XXII

THE VISION

HAD the swine walked in at the feast to claim acquaintance with the prodigal son, that returned wanderer could not have been more startled and degraded in his own eyes than was John Doe at the appearance of his one-time cronies of the Bowery. Revolting ghosts from his besotted past, they had come in upon him to soil the cleanness of his present manhood. Why, his swine were there before he had even sat at the feast, before the fattened calf had been killed; and he shuddered to think of the long train of persecution which had threatened him. It had been his impulse to share with these unfortunates some measure of his prosperity, but, in a flash, he had seen before him endless extortion which would finish only with his death. Let him go where he would, these vermin would find him out, and intrude their brazen faces, made impudent by his helplessness, into the finest and best of his rightfully earned surroundings. The one glowing

dream of his life centered on the day when, freed from all his clogs and encumbrances, and walking upright in the mental and moral and spiritual image of God, he should rejoin Jean and Tavy! Even into that sanctuary these foul birds of carrion would intrude; would present their frowsy selves before the pure eyes of his wife and daughter, and, clapping him on the shoulder, call him brother!

No man may escape his guilt. He cannot hide himself so well beneath the guise of respectability, the shelter of wealth, nor the wall of years, but that, at some unexpected moment, when the world seems the happiest and the gayest and the fullest of radiant promise, his old-time sin will raise its frightful visage above the horizon, and cover all his sky.

That beautiful little problem in roof construction, that delicate problem, the solution of which must combine strength and grace, and which had promised so much pleasure; he looked upon it now with aversion. The joy was gone from it, as all joy from this hour had departed from him. He put on his coat and hat and left the office, but, before he went, he considered well what, if any, moral obligation he owed to his old companions, Jerry-the-Limp and Piggy Marshall and Red Whitey and Tank Tonkey. If it be the obliga-

tion of the strong to protect the weak, of the able to feed the incompetent, of the ambitious to supply the lazy, of the rich to support the poor, then he owed a debt to his afore-time brother swine. Money laid in their hands would do them no good, so he called up Mike Dowd again, and, much to that gentleman's indignant protest, arranged a fund to be held secretly for the denizens at the Sink, when they should be ill or in trouble, or immoderately thirsty. Then, his conscience washed of this, he went home to the dim, heavy quiet of Billy's lounging-room.

Burke came in to offer his services, but, being an experienced soldier of fortune, he discerned in a glance, without being told, that John Doe would infinitely prefer to be alone; so Burke quietly effaced himself.

The old, old occupation, the one which came upon him at every untoward turn of his new life; self-analysis, self-revilement, deep, deep self-abasement; and these things are good for no man except for a momentary acknowledgment to strengthen him. Slowly, inexorably, he went back over his distorted career, trying to comprehend by what impossible steps he had slipped into the degrading annihilation from which Billy had rescued him. It was incredible! He could not see how

it was possible for any man of brilliant intellectual attainments, of notable and honorable achievement, of enviable social position, of rare, high fortune in his married life, to forsake all these things for an existence of foul besottedness, the consequences of which, even now, after the miracle which had happened to him, could be terrible. Even now his soul was writhing in abject misery. Tavy was miserable; Jean was miserable; Billy, good, kind Billy who had brought him back from his wretched oblivion, was miserable. And for what? All for that yellow liquid which stood in the decanter at his hand, a glass beside it.

Whisky. What was it? A taste on the tongue, a numbing of the brain, an exhilaration of the blood, and then a paralysis of every single thing, physical, mental, and moral, which is the best in man; a paralysis in which there is no joy, no happiness, no comfort. Why! Why should a man voluntarily subject himself to this debasement of every nobler instinct, of every finer attribute, of every quality he holds most dear! It was monstrous! It was not to be believed!

A taste upon the tongue, a numbing of the brain, an exhilarating of the blood, that was all. There was nothing more which could be catalogued as a reason for tilting that decanter, and pouring the

pungent yellow liquid into a glass and swallowing it. That was all; and yet men gave their wealth, their abilities, their families, their lives, their souls, to tilt that decanter and pour the yellow liquid into the glass, and swallow it! A taste upon the tongue, a numbing of the brain, an exhilaration of the blood. John Doe reached out and laid his hand upon the decanter.

What devil of perversity had seized upon him! Why, looking this inexplicable enigma calmly and logically in the face, should he suddenly be impelled to tilt that decanter and pour the yellow liquid into the glass, and swallow it? Why, knowing all that he knew, should he be seized with a sudden fierce desire to feel that taste upon his tongue, to feel those numbing fumes ascending into his brain? There would ensue a dizzy discomfort, a revolt of his stomach, a thickening of his tongue, a blurring of his eyes, an ugly relaxation of all his facial muscles, and yet ——

By God, he must have it! He must! That old fever of desire swept upon him with an irresistible flood, it shook him from head to foot, it distended his eyes, it strained the leaders of his throat, it grasped him with a demoniacal frenzy! He must have it, in spite of all knowledge, in spite of all reasoning, in spite of all that

he held most dear, in spite of man, in spite of God! There was no reason for this, there was no explanation, there was no possible way of understanding; but he must feel that taste upon his tongue! It was the impulse of a maniac, of a madman, of some accursed fiend which had driven out John Doe from this helpless body, and urged it to its destruction! He was bent and crouched and rigidly tensed in every in-curving member, even to his claw-like fingers, as, with widely spread mouth and staring eyes, he lifted the glass and filled it to the brim, and raised it, trembling, toward his lips!

Tavy! She stood just before him, staring in shocked wonder, her luminous gray eyes struggling between surprise and reproach, her sweet face pallid, her black ringlets clustering about her white brow, her exquisitely curved lips, which had half parted in a smile of welcome, now stiffened. At first he thought that the beautiful figure in the mouse-colored frock was an apparition; but no, it was Tavy, Tavy herself, Tavy in the flesh! During the whirl of his mad lunacy, she had come in at the door, unnoticed, and Billy now followed her. All John Doe's tensed muscles relaxed, and from his nerveless fingers he dropped the glass!

After such a whirlwind of passion he would

normally have sunk into a chair, exhausted, limp, but there had come a new and an even more powerful stimulus. This was his daughter, his Tavy, one of the two images which he had held before his mind by night and by day, until she, with Jean, had become a part of all his mind, of all his soul, of his very flesh and blood!

And she had come to save him! She had appeared like a blessed vision sent from Heaven, to stop him in that one and only moment when his own strength had not been sufficient for his needs, to stop him at the instant when he was about to take the downward plunge into that hell from which he could never again arise! In that he saw the finger of divine intervention, and in him there welled up a great flood of gratitude, which swept away all that cold repression he had for so long forced upon himself; and, as he looked upon her, as the great change came over him which brought him back from the distortion wrought by the fiend of craving, he saw her eyes soften with compassion and her lips curve with the smile of sweet pity.

"Tavy!" The cry burst from him in an agony of love and longing. "My little Tavy!" and he stretched out his trembling arms.

For a startled instant she turned to Billy, her heart beating high and fast.

“He is your father, Tavy.”

Her father! At first she could not comprehend it. Her father! She was dazed. Then, as the full significance of the revelation broke upon her, she sprang to him. She was in his arms and sobbing upon his shoulder, and, over and over, with a broken voice, and the tears streaming down his white cheeks, he was calling her his little Tavy, his little Tavy, his little Tavy!

CHAPTER XXIII

SIDE BY SIDE

FATHER and daughter! What transports they knew in this hour of their re-union! They were so lost in the wonder of being together, after their fifteen years of separation, that they did not notice when Billy tip-toed from the room; and they were still so lost in their joy that they scarcely noticed when he returned. They were sitting in the leather couch near the window. The eyes of Tavy were moist with happy tears, and upon Harrison Stuart, long sick of heart hunger, there had come a great peace from the mere presence of his beautiful daughter, whose warm little hand he now stroked and patted and fondled.

They were both eager in their welcome of Billy, when they became aware of him. Tavy made room for him on the couch, and, with one hand in his and one in her father's, she was a very, very happy little Tavy indeed.

They were rather quiet for a trio to whom had

come so much that was new and wonderful, when suddenly, out of a clear sky, as it were, came the question of why Billy and Tavy had come here.

"I'm not quite sure," puzzled Billy, while Tavy smiled at his confusion. "I think we meant to run off or something. You know, Tavy and I have not seen each other for two weeks, and we accidentally met in the park this morning. Of course, we didn't see how we were ever going to be separated again, so we came up here to talk it over."

"I understand." Tavy's father was very grave and thoughtful. "I feel certain that, after you had talked it over, you would have decided for Tavy to go home to her mother."

They seemed to be doubtful of that. Neither of them answered for a while, and Billy moved a little closer to Tavy.

"Well, I don't know," was the frank admission. "I don't believe we intended to do that."

"You see, Daddy—" She stopped, and laughed in sheer delight. It was so strange to use that word, and yet so good! "You see, Daddy, Billy is never going to—to forget himself any more; but Mummy wouldn't believe it for a long, long time; but if Billy and I were just to be married, then, by and by when Billy had turned out

all right, Mummy would be very glad that we — had done it.”

She was so ingenious about it, so certain that she was right, so charming in her sureness that any one could see this simple logic, that Harrison Stuart knitted his brows in concern.

“So you would have been married,” he pondered, and thought it over a long, long time. “No, Tavy, it wouldn’t do. I know, if Billy doesn’t, just what danger there is. Billy thinks he is cured, and I hope that he is, but he has not yet passed through his fire of temptation. He must conquer his enemy before he marries my little Tavy.”

“But I could help him.”

“Not that! Not that!” There was the harshness of sudden fear in his voice. “Tavy.” He hesitated. “Has your mother told you my history?”

She sat motionless, and the color slowly ran up into her cheeks. She felt almost guilty in the knowledge which she had of her father. She was ashamed, not alone for him, but ashamed that she knew. The long, curving lashes came down over her eyes, and the hand which lay in Harrison Stuart’s clasped his own, in fondness.

“She has, then.” He surmised it from her

downcast eyes, from her confusion, from her silence, and, for a moment, he bowed his head. This was a humiliation which hurt more than all his other hurts!

"Only just now, Daddy." She edged closer to him, and drew Billy with her. "It was not until the night Billy — went away," and this time it was Billy's turn for self-abasement. Of the three, Tavy alone, clear-eyed, clear-souled Tavy, had no cause for self-reproach, and yet she was as ashamed as they, and this added the more to their guilt.

"Then you know that, in one case at least, marrying a man to reform him was a failure." He spoke quickly, as he grappled with the problem which confronted them. He put hurt pride away from him. "Billy believes in himself, and you believe in him, but your father and mother are going to insist that Billy must prove his strength before, not after, he has taken your happiness in his hands." Both young people were silent and sombre-eyed, but there was a certain squaring of Billy's mouth which indicated some strong resolution in him. "I'm going to propose a plan," Tavy's father went on. "I have yet some time before I can announce myself as Harrison Stuart. I must be sure that there can be no further stain attached to that name before I take it to my wife."

"Why, Daddy!" Tavy turned to him in astonishment. "You talk as though you were going to stay here! I wouldn't go home to Mummy without you! Oh, she'll be so happy, Daddy!" and, reaching up, she pressed her warm face against his cold one, and patted his other cheek.

"Not yet, Tavy dear. Why, only to-day I would have fallen, had not God sent you to me just in time. I dare not go to Jean so long as this danger threatens me. Every day I fight this battle, and, until I win, your mother must not know that I am alive. I must have your promise for that. You see why, don't you?"

A pressure of the hand was his only answer. Tavy's eyes were swimming with tears. Poor Mummy, poor Mummy! And poor Daddy! And poor Billy! And poor Tavy!

"I shall win, however." There was the ring of confidence in his voice. "You must go home, Tavy, and Billy must fight out his battle, side by side with me. Then when we are perfectly sure of ourselves, we will come to you, side by side. How about it, Billy?"

The two men looked at each other for a moment, and then they shook hands, across Tavy, and she was a very, very happy little girl, for one with so many tears in her eyes.

"It will be the first real secret I ever had from Mummy," she wondered. "I don't know how I shall ever keep it!"

"You will have more," and now there was exultation in his tone. "I have you, Tavy, and that is a joy I had not dared to hope for until the end of my trial. You must arrange for clandestine meetings with Billy and me, and we'll buy a beautiful house for Mummy, and spend the time in fitting it up, so that we may take her home like a royal princess when the happiest day of my life arrives."

Tavy clapped her hands at that, and laughed like a child. It was such a glorious trick to play on Mummy, such a delightful secret to hug to one's breast!

"It's dreadfully late," and she looked reproachfully at the clock on the mantel. "I have to start home in a hurry, or Mummy will be worried. I don't suppose we could spare time to drive out right now past some of the places where we might want to buy the house."

"I don't suppose we could," her father laughed. "If Mummy is worried about you, I think I had better give you up immediately."

He did not, however. He kept her there for many fleeting minutes, and it was a very difficult

parting, indeed. Billy wanted to take her to the corner near the enchanted apartments, but she would not let him. Instead, she had her father and Billy both escort her to the stage, and, as far as she could see through the crowded traffic, she looked back out of the window and watched them standing on the curb, side by side, the old man and the young, at the threshold of their mutual battle.

What a mixture of emotions was the sparkling and bubbling and worried and dubious Tavy who hesitated at the door of the enchanted pink and gray parlor. Her eyes were dancing, her cheeks were aglow, the imps peeped cautiously from her glossy curls, and there was a little pucker in her brow. She had to keep the wonderful secret of a new found daddy, and of the beautiful cottage for the royal princess, and she had also to reinstate Billy, so no wonder she was all ajumble.

"Where have you been, Tavy? You're late," exclaimed her mother, the traces of her anxiety still upon her.

"With Billy." The frank reply promptly, but in a doubtful voice.

There was a startled look in Jean Stuart's face, and then she turned and walked into the bay window, where she stood and looked down at the river, in deep trouble. She had known that this

moment must come, and she had her answer ready, but it was a difficult one to speak. The arms of her daughter stole about her.

“Mummy dear.” The voice was low and pleading. “Billy must come back. I know that he will never drink too much again. It isn’t fair to judge him by your experience. It isn’t fair not to give him a second chance. Please, Mummy; I love Billy so.”

Jean Stuart took her daughter in her arms, laid her hand upon the glossy curls and drew the head upon her shoulder, as if by that she could surround this child of hers from the sorrow which had been her own. Yes, she knew love, and just what appalling self-sacrifice it could mean, and it was because Tavy loved Billy so that her mother was strengthened in her determination.

“It is against my wishes for Billy to come here or for you to meet him,” she said, reflecting curiously that her voice was harsh and dry. A sob aroused her, and she turned. Tavy had found the picture of Billy, but, as she caught the pitying gaze of her mother, she clasped the picture and went into her own room.

It was a long, long time before Jean Stuart followed. In the dainty little delf and white room, she found Tavy kneeling by the bedside, the pic-

ture before her, and the head of black curls pillowed upon her arm. The shoulders were trembling with silent sobs.

Had she been harsh? Had Tommy Tinkle been right when he said that her judgment was warped? Jean did not know. She only saw that this child whom she had carried in her arms, blood of her blood and flesh of her flesh, was in deep sorrow, and suddenly, with the tears at last springing into her own dry eyes, and with a tugging at her heart strings which she could not resist, she bent over her daughter in a flood of tenderness.

"Tavy dear," and her hand again sought the curly head; "Billy may have his second chance."

CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN ONE HAS A TAVY

WAS there ever such a place as Woodbrier! To reach Woodbrier, you ride on the wings of love along fairy streets and elfin roads and magic forests, over hills of ecstatic joy and through glades of endless bliss; that is, you do it if you are a Billy and have a Tavy by your side, all swathed in a shapeless duster and perked with a charming motor bonnet, and protected by a gauzy veil which half conceals and half reveals bright eyes and softly glowing cheeks and glossy black curls. Even the presence of a partially convinced and somewhat reluctant Mummy Stuart will not cool your delirium, as, with such a Tavy by your side, you turn in at the paradise which is Woodbrier. You go down some rude steps, which twist and turn amid great swaying trees, and you come upon a little rustic house, the broad porches of which overhang a little rock-bound lake. The water is deep and clear and blue, and the steep dark hills which confine it are up-

side down in its pellucid depths, so that the tops of the trees and the blue of the sky meet in the water; and you may look far, far down into that bewitched mirror and read a happy future — if you have a Tavy by your side.

That was the future Billy read, from their rustic table on the porch, where a sort of glorified waiter takes your order and goes away and you forget about him for a long, long time, so that he is not bothersome, and you can pay more attention to the Tavy by your side.

Of course the swathing duster was thrown off, and the gauzy veil lifted, and even Mrs. Stuart's wrap was laid aside by some necromancy. Oh, yes, Billy had done it himself, with a smile and a bow and a pleasant word, but he forgot about it in a moment after, forgot about it in the wonder of Tavy's luminous big eyes, blue now, like a troubled sky.

This was Billy's first outing with Tavy and Tavy's mother, his first meeting, in fact, since that wonderful time, three days before, when he found Tavy in the little park and caught her in his arms; and Billy, for all his happiness, was grave and thoughtful, too, for he realized that he was merely allowed to call, not really desired; that is, by one of the ladies. He felt keenly that he must be on

his good behavior, so he automatically remembered, now and then, to smile at Mummy Stuart and speak a pleasant word; but this was difficult. He was very fond of Mummy Stuart; but he had been separated from Tavy for so long; and love is selfish, as it must always be; and mothers have lived their lives; and the world is for the young!

Was there ever such a place as Woodbrier, where the wild flowers tangle in the grass, and a choir of birds sings, unceasingly; where soft breezes come to ruffle the surface of the glossy little lake, and whisper wonderful secrets in the swaying branches of the trees; and where all the food and drink is nectar and ambrosia, when one is a Billy and has a Tavy by his side.

What was that which sparkled and glittered and danced, with a thousand flashing colors, on Tavy's hand? The ring! It was placed there, in the enchanted pink and gray parlor, just before the start for Woodbrier, but with the distinct understanding that it was the symbol of Billy's strength, and that when Billy's strength should vanish, the ring should vanish, never to return! Such an easy condition that, by which to place a ring of such glorious significance on the finger of such a marvelous girl as Tavy; and now here was the ring, happy, too, it seemed, catching the blue of the sky

and the green of the leaves and the red of the charming motor-bonnet and the gold of the sun, and all the other countless tints and shades from far and near, and darting them in all directions, as if it were a fountain of sparks.

Mrs. Stuart, watching Billy and Tavy, and seeing how happy they were in each other, relented a little of her grimness. He was a fine-looking young fellow, manly, wholesome, honorable, trustworthy. Could it be possible that her own bitter experience had warped her judgment and made her harsh? Perhaps. It was not unlikely. Billy might turn out to be entirely safe, and, if so, little Tavy would be happy all her life, and that was all which was to be desired. At any rate, he had his second chance, and he should not be cramped by unsympathetic reserve. That is not the best help which an anxious and eager young man can have, one who is sturdily bound to do right, one who, clear down in the honest heart of him, wishes to deserve approbation. So Tavy's mother, having had plenty of time to think all these things, while the lovers were with many words saying nothing at all to each other, at last seized on one of those instants when Billy paused to look at her and smile politely. She leaned forward, and there was a delicate flush upon her cheeks, for the set-

ting of things and the ride had done her good.

“ I’ll have to confess that I have missed these little outings, Billy.”

There was not much more needed to make young Lane’s happiness complete and unalloyed. That was the first genuinely friendly word Tavy’s mother had said to him; but it was not the last. She was very pleasant indeed during that wonderful dinner, and when the odd lanterns were lit and the sun had faded away, and the song of the birds had died in sleepy goodnight chirps, and there were stars in the glassy little lake, and soft music from somewhere around the mysterious leaf-hidden corner, why, Elysium could offer no advantage over Woodbrier!

Then there was the ride home, back through the magic forests, and the elfin roads, and the fairy streets, to the enchanted apartment, where Mrs. Stuart was thoughtful enough to allow the enchanted couple a long, blissful hour all by themselves. Only once did Mummy Stuart break the pleasant let-by-gones-be-by-gones spirit which she had assumed for the young man’s benefit, and that was when, on bidding him goodnight, she held his hand for a moment and looked earnestly and wistfully into his eyes, and said: “ Remember, Billy, never again; never! ”

And Billy, with his whole heart and his whole soul and with all his purpose of high honor in his eyes, repeated after her: "Never again, never!"

When Mrs. Stuart had gone to her own room, she wondered at the tremendous amount of laughing and whispering in the pink and gray parlor. Young people just on the verge of blissful unknown seas were given to whispering perhaps, but not to so much free and joyous laughing; but not many young people in their circumstances had such an amazing secret to hide from a mother. Their entire hour was spent in talking about the perfect house which was to be bought and furnished, for the home-coming of the royal princess. And that was nearly the whole of the burden of the love making.

The very next day Billy secured Tavy for a drive, all by himself, and the first place they went was to the office of William Lane, where they secured, without a particle of coaxing, the company of a distinguished looking elderly gentleman with waving hair and a neatly trimmed silver Vandyke, and a far-away suggestion of imps in his dark gray eyes, and a nugget of joy in his heart so big and so bright that it glowed right up through his countenance.

A ridiculous thing transpired, when they were

all three in the car. Billy had a list of houses; but so had the distinguished-looking elderly gentleman; but so had Tavy! And whose list did they go to see first? How foolish it would be to answer the question.

That was a glorious afternoon, too, an afternoon of boundless happiness! Of course, not one of the houses was quite good enough for the royal princess. They never are, on the first day, but there were other days to come, days of just such tremendous enjoyment as this.

Two nights later, there was another big secret for Tavy to keep. Tavy and Mummy Stuart and Billy went to the theater, and she knew exactly where to look, away in the corner under the balcony, for the distinguished-looking gentleman with a pair of folding opera glasses, who stared at them rudely all through the show. That was the hardest secret of all to keep, for Tavy could not forbear smiling and nodding to the distinguished-looking elderly gentleman, whenever Mummy Stuart's back was turned, and once she waved her hand at him, and half a dozen times she was nearly caught, and altogether it was the most enjoyable, exciting and ecstatic and nervous evening she had ever passed! Part of the joy of it, too, was that Billy was constantly on pins and needles for fear that

she would be discovered, and once or twice he was almost on the point of using sheer force to keep Mummy Stuart from looking steadfastly in that direction. It amused Tavy to see him so busy, but he was used to being busy these days. He was so busy, in fact, that not until a full week after his reinstatement at the enchanted apartments did he carry the good news to Geraldine.

Before going out to the Benning house, he telephoned, and when he arrived he found Geraldine in the quaintly screened summer-house at the end of the pergola, dressed in something light and fluffy, and suggestive somehow of a garden full of marguerites.

"Well, Sis, I'm happy again!" he loudly told her, as he shook both the hands she held out to him. "Tavy took me back!"

"Yes, so Tommy told me." She was sweetly sympathetic with his happiness, smiling with pleasure at his good fortune. "Tommy says you have to behave, though," and she laughed, as if that were a splendid joke on Billy.

"You bet I do, or it's all off with me." He sat in the hammock beside her, and rumpled his hair, a way he had when he was excessively happy or excessively worried. "Geraldine, I'm the luckiest fellow in the world! I have such splendid

friends, my business is good, and Tavy is positively the most beautiful, the most charming, the most ——”

“I know all about it,” interrupted Geraldine, with a laugh which the caller did not stop to analyze. If he had, he would have found the guile in it. “Tommy says you are only taken back on approval.”

“That’s putting it.” He was quite cheerful about it. “But that’s the same as unconditional, for there’s no danger of me doing anything to make them send me away. Why, Geraldine, for a girl like Tavy, there’s no chance that I could make a break! She is the cleverest, the sweetest, the — Say; hasn’t she the most wonderful eyes!”

Geraldine scarcely heard him. She had been pondering deeply, but when he paused she came out of her abstraction.

“Yes, hasn’t she? You’re not drinking at all, are you, Billy?”

“Not whisky,” he replied, with a shake of his head. “I’m afraid of it. If I were to get a taste of it, I’d drink all there is. Why, Geraldine, I’ve even wanted it! I’ve had to fight it; and if I ever get drunk again, I get back the ring for keeps.”

Again Geraldine fell into a brown study. Presently she looked up brightly.

“By the way, Billy, I nearly forgot. I was going to give a party for Tavy and you, when you interrupted the program. Suppose we make it the seventeenth?”

CHAPTER XXV

THE GAYEST NIGHT OF TAVY'S LIFE

HOW can any one in the world be so flutteringly happy as a Tavy Stuart, and contain it all? Why, this is her first real party; and such a party it is! The big Benning house blazes from every window and, wherever one goes there is the buzz of gay conversation, the sounds of gay laughter, the strains of gay music. Tavy wants to say that it is like a fairyland, but that word scarcely seems adequate, for she has seen so many fairylands of late, and this is so much bigger, and grander, and finer, than everything she had ever dreamed!

Everybody is so nice to Tavy, too! There is always a dozen or more of the boys and girls around her, and their admiration is frank and sincere. Dimpled little Dolly Parsons has fallen dead in love with her fresh young beauty, with her delicately tinted complexion, and her luminous big dark eyes, and her black curls, all enchanted by the simple little white chiffon gown, with its sleeves

so absurdly short that they are scarcely any sleeves at all, just like puffs, revealing her beautifully tapering arms, and her smooth white shoulders, and her graceful neck. So dimpled little Dolly, who is fair and fairy-like, clings to Tavy from the minute they are introduced, and the two smallest young ladies at the party sweep everything before them, and are the center of a jolly group wherever they move. Geraldine had planned a merry little trick. She had intended to post all her friends to surround Tavy throughout the evening so that the newly-engaged couple should not have a chance for a word with each other, but Tavy had arrived, with Billy, before she had time to carry out that idea, and now it is quite unnecessary; for Tavy had become instantly popular, and Geraldine should be highly pleased. In fact, she says that she is, as she passes the door of the dancing-room on the arm of Billy.

“I’m so proud to introduce Tavy to our friends. It hasn’t taken her long to win them.”

If there is in this a covert hint that Tavy has been forward, or presumptuous, in charming all these friends of theirs so quickly, Billy is as unconscious of it as he is of Geraldine’s stunning Egyptian costume, old blue and gold, with a glittering dark tiara in her burnished copper hair. It

is the handsomest and most becoming gown at the party, and yet Tavy's simple little frock of pearl white chiffon seems to be startlingly effective. How fortunate for Tavy.

"Isn't she stunning!" says William Lane, not the least bit jealous that Tavy is constantly surrounded so that he cannot get near her; and clear across the room, as her big eyes look toward him, he sends her a wave which is so redolent of pride that the Egyptian young lady hurries him on past the door. She doesn't have so many opportunities to enjoy Billy as she used.

Here comes Tommy Tinkle, his familiar whimsical grin much in evidence, and he edges into Tavy's chattering bevy, and surveys her triumph in huge delight.

"My dance, Ringlets." He has a nick-name for everybody, has Tommy. "It's the Moukowa," and he and Tavy have their own sly laugh over this announcement; for Tommy and Billy have been up to the enchanted apartments every night for the past two weeks, teaching Tavy all the latest dances, and the Moukowa has been the most difficult to learn, because it is the ugliest and least graceful.

"Are you having a good time?" asks Tommy, as he leads her out on the floor.

"Blissful!" she happily confesses, and a little fluttering sigh attests how profoundly she means that word.

"It is well," approves Tommy. "May you never be less happy than to-night is the wish of your true friend, T. Tinkle. To be continued in our next. Now watch that tricky skip step at the turn, for here we start to Moukow."

"I suppose you're not even touching pink lemonade, Billy." It is Geraldine, in the supper-room, and she pauses at the buffet where stands a great bowl of purple punch.

"If you mean this stuff, I'm not fond enough of it to drink enough to hurt me," laughs Billy. "What's in it?"

"Goodness only knows," smiles Geraldine. "Father made it himself, and it's probably weird." She hands him two of the cut glass cups, and he ladles the punch into them, hands Geraldine her glass, and tastes from his own.

"Practically a beverage, not a drink." He tastes it again. "Rather refreshing, though." He empties his glass and sets it down, and, for just an instant, there is a flash in Geraldine's eye. The drink is quite harmless, but it leaves a pleasant little tang on the tongue, which promotes thirst for more. And this is what Three-B Benning

considers an ideal requisite in a punch for young folks' parties, since gallons of it would not make a headache.

What a busy Tavy! She is hurried from one place to another, and from one thought to another, and from one person to another, until she is all one white-chiffoned little bundle of happy bewilderment. Sam Langster parades her out through the gorgeous conservatory, and explains Benning's rare collection. Sam is a fanatic on plants, and will talk for hours on that subject to any one who will listen. Dolly Parsons and Bert Hasselton rescue her from Sam's botanical ecstasies, and they all wander into the library, where Tommy Tinkle is giving a profound imitation of Socrates, and issuing a series of such distorted epigrams of wisdom as to "excite laughter in all beholders," as he himself gravely claims. He laughs at his own jokes, does Tommy, in this imitation, and elaborately points out their wit, and extracts more fun out of making fun of himself than he does out of making fun of anybody else, which, though not so dignified, is more kindly.

Billy's dance again, his second of the evening and he is to have one more, the last one. This is a happy moment! He is there at the first instant in which he can claim her; big, handsome

Billy, by all odds the handsomest, and best, and noblest young man at the party. Tavy glows with pride as they march into the ball-room, and there is no expressing the pride which swells the bosom of Billy. Nothing like Tavy was ever created, and, as he looks down at her daintily flushed cheeks and her sparkling eyes, and at what those eyes tell him, he wonders again how he ever was so fortunate as to find, and woo, and win this marvelous creature! His arm slips around her waist, and holding her hand, he looks down at her fondly as the music strikes up. Why, it is an old-fashioned waltz, introduced into this evening's program as a supreme novelty. Tavy knows that dance perfectly. Her mother taught it to her. Now Billy's strong arm presses her to him, and they are floating in a maze of dreamy rapture. How lithe and flexible are the muscles of the arm which touches and holds her. How delicate is that pulse in the velvet-palm where it rests lightly on his shoulder. Every contact is a caress, every movement is a mutual exaltation; it is as if they two are one, and wafted, to the strains of ethereal music, upon zephyrs of celestial bliss! The long lashes of Tavy are drooped over her eyes, and, for a moment, she is half swooning with the happiness and tremulous joy of this night of all nights.

Billy's warm breath is on her hair, his low voice is in her ear. With an inspired tongue he is giving her a list of all her own remarkable and distinctive charms and perfections. He had no idea that he was so poetic, but how could a fellow help being poetic with such an inspiring girl as Tavy! Why, life is to be one endless waltz, like this, with no discord in the music, and no dimming of the lights, and no fatigue! Clapsed in this pulsing embrace, they are to be buoyed on and on through eternities of such felicity, eyes to eyes, and heart to heart, and soul to soul!

Oh! The music has stopped, the waltz is done, and now they are going into the supper-room, skipping across the floor, in an exhilaration of spirit which is such a delicious intoxication that it is a pity it cannot have a monopoly of stimulants.

There are other laughing couples in the supper-room, and, in a moment more, Tavy is in the center of a crowd again. They all know each other, these friends of Billy's and Tommy's and Geraldine's, but Tavy is a stranger, and exceptionally beautiful, and clever in a different little way, and the girl who is going to marry Billy; so they are all very nice to her. There is no formal supper at the party, for the dance is too important. There are just tables spread with everything in

the world, and you walk in and help yourself, and a cast-iron butler, aided by a porcelain second butler, pours wine and ladles punch and serves ices and replenishes things in general, and it is very wonderful to wide-eyed Tavy, who neither tries to act as if she were used to all these magnificent things nor betrays any undue unfamiliarity; for Tavy has one gift from her mother which is far more precious than any jewel, and cannot be bought with gold, and is an open sesame in any company: breeding. Geraldine Benning takes particular note of that quality, and again there is the little flash of a glitter in her eye.

The fun is never to end it seems. Here comes a dapper young man, led by Dolly Parsons, and introduced as Tavy's next dancing partner. He dances superbly, though not with that fine strong ease of Billy. Nobody can dance like Billy. Nobody can do anything like Billy; but, indeed, how could it be expected of them!

"Get me some punch, Billy. I'm dreadfully thirsty to-night!" Geraldine. It is their dance, but she has preferred to sit it out. She is nibbling at a peppermint wafer, and she has given him one. He has it crunched in his mouth now.

"All right, Sis," and he starts away.

"I think I saw a pitcher of it on the tabourette

behind the palms." Geraldine drawls this lazily.

They are in the alcove leading off from the conservatory, a cozy little, dimly-lighted corner, with a thick rug on the floor, and easy tête-à-tête chairs. Billy brings in the tray with the tall pitcher and some glasses, and pours for her. He pours for himself.

"This beverage is almost like a drink," he observes. "I'll have to tell Three-B to serve a peppermint wafer with each glass," and Geraldine watches him curiously as he drinks it.

"Tavy is a pretty dancer. As soon as she is more familiar with the new steps, we'll take her up to one of Mrs. Wilton's affairs."

Billy does not notice the slight in that remark, but he does notice that Tavy has been mentioned, and that is enough for him, quite sufficient to chain his attention for any length of time; so they chat comfortably away, and Billy pours more of the punch out of the tall pitcher from behind the palms, and drinks it. With the third glass he smacks his lips, and considers.

"By George, I believe there's the flavor of whisky in this stuff! I haven't tasted it for a month, but I could tell a drop of it in the ocean, I think. It leaves a peculiar taste on the tongue."

Geraldine veils her eyes, lest that glitter be seen.

"There couldn't be much of it," she smiles, as nonchalantly as if it were of no consequence. "Father's dance punch is too harmless to be interesting."

"Whisky in it just the same." Billy laughs, and drains his glass, and accepts the peppermint wafer which Geraldine hands him. The peppermint cannot altogether disguise the flavor which is in this pitcher of very special punch, but it can disguise the quantity! And the taste is on his tongue!

The library is the favorite lounging-place for those who do not dance every number. B. B. Benning holds sway in here, during the latter half of the evening, and he is very much taken with Billy's Tavy. She sits out a dance in the library with a tall-foreheaded young man who has overdone a sprained ankle, and quite a little crowd gathers. Three-B Benning makes room for Tavy on the bench beside him. He loves youth and laughter better than he loves old wine; and Tavy represents all three, considering the wine to be the wine of life. They are discussing a weighty subject; boxing.

"They never come back," declares pompous old Joseph Gandish, whose chest protrudes so far that he has to stoop to look down. "It's true of all the champions, and in all the sports."

Tavy glances at the high-panelled wainscoting, and the big, solemn pictures, and the beamed ceiling, and the rich conglomeration of rare and expensive bronzes and other quaint things, all blended and subdued in the light from the great, low, red lamp shade, and she speculates on sometime having a chance to examine all these interesting things in detail. She has an inherited appreciation for beautiful pieces of handwork.

"Nobody ever comes back," says Three-B Benning, dropping his cigarette in an ash receiver. He has noted that the smoke follows Tavy.

"You said those very words one night at an uptown supper dance," Mrs. Benning reminds him. Somehow, she always gravitates, by a sort of unconscious instinct, into the same quarter of the house with Three-B. "We were talking about some funny drunkard whom Billy Lane brought from the Bowery to his apartments."

"Oh, yes!" Mrs. Mortissant, who is even gayer now than when she was Miriam Hasselton. "Do you remember the atrocious caricature Tommy Tinkle drew of him; a blear-eyed, awful

creature, peering through a tangle of matted hair and beard? His name was Bow-Wow."

Tommy Tinkle comes loafing in, on the name, and, startled, he catches the dawning look of horror in Tavy's face.

"Whatever became of him, Tommy?" The heavy voice of Joseph Gandish. "Nothing good, I'll be bound."

"Bow-Wow? Oh, yes." Tommy laughs, as one discovering a joke after an effort at memory. "You were quite right, Gandish. He set fire to his bed, and Burke put him out and he's never been seen, nor heard from, since." He does not look at Tavy as he speaks, but he can hear an almost inaudible drawing in of the breath.

Tavy rises presently, very quietly and inconspicuously.

"I haven't been on the veranda, Tommy. It must be pretty out there," and, as they pass into the fresh night air, he feels her hand tremble on his arm. She says nothing, but there is a trace of pallor on her cheeks, and her bosom flutters now and then; and when the music starts and they come back into the ballroom, he is sure that the look in her eyes, as she leaves him for her dancing partner, is a look of gratitude.

Bow-Wow! What a dreadful name for any

human being to have borne, even a poor drunkard from the Bowery, who set fire to his bed, and was turned out, and was never heard of any more! Tavy wanted Billy. She wanted him all through that dance, and the next and the next, for somehow there had come just the faintest, far-off hint of sadness into this happiest night of her life. Bow-Wow! She could not get the name out of her mind!

She missed Billy so much during these last few dances. He was not even on the floor for her to look at; and, when she was worried, he was so comforting, with his strong, clean-cut features, and his clear eyes so full of understanding. It was a silly custom to make people dance with everybody, when they would so much rather dance with just one. Especially after a person became tired, it was so good to have a firm arm for support, and one the embrace of which could be courted rather than ignored. However, at last the program was nearly done, and the very next dance would be Billy's! She smiled, and her eyes brightened as she thought of that.

It was Geraldine who joined her just before the last dance, and, quite naturally, Tavy asked her if she had seen Billy.

"Not for ages," replied the cheerful voice of

Geraldine. "I'm sending out a call for the last dance, though, and we'll have everybody from their hidden corners," and, laughing, she went away. She was back in a minute or two, however, and immediately searched for her dear friend Tavy.

They were together in the ballroom, amid quite a little group of Tavy's new friends and admirers, when the hide-aways began to stroll in.

She had no need to turn and watch Billy. She could tell all about him from the look on Tavy's face! Those delicately tinted oval cheeks had turned as white as the poor little chiffon frock, the same one she had worn the night Billy was late for the theater engagement. Tavy's eyes widened with terror, and she stood as rigid as if she had been frozen into a beautiful snow statue! The glitter in Geraldine's eyes was thoroughly unveiled now, as, noting the death-like silence and the shocked faces, she turned to survey Billy. His hair was rumpled down over his forehead, on his lips was a foolish grin, while out of his swaying body and his puffed face his familiar demon leered its red leer and snarled its red snarl. Billy was drunk!

CHAPTER XXVI

GERALDINE LISTENS

FOR a moment Tavy stood, weak, faint, sick; yet, without a tremor, she walked straight through that circle of staring eyes, and took the arm of the man she had promised to marry.

"We're going home, Billy," she said, and, though her voice was calm and low, it was strangely without flexibility.

He looked down at her with his foolish smile, and patted the icy hand which lay on his arm.

"All right, Tavy." His tongue was thick, but he was entirely willing. He was perfectly agreeable to anything she wanted; dear little Tavy! Most wonderful girl in the world! "Good-night all," he mouthed over his shoulder, and he stumbled slightly as he turned, stumbled and swayed; and into her body he carried the same sway, so it was as if she, too, were drunk; for no man and no woman who have made themselves one, can escape each their share of the sins of the other. So it was that Tavy finished the

gayest night of her life, and quitted the ballroom floor of her first real party, leaving behind her half a hundred pitying witnesses of her shame!

Three-B Benning, Tommy Tinkle and Geraldine followed swiftly to the door.

"We can't let her go home with him," said Tommy to Benning as they converged.

"Certainly not!" Benning was furious. "We'll see the girl home in my car."

Tommy nodded his head with a sharp jerk.

"Good. I'll take Billy to the club."

"Take him to the devil! Any place so the beast gets out of my house! And he can't come back; ever! Tell him that when he wakes up."

Geraldine had passed them, and overtook Tavy and Billy just ahead in the hall.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am," she sympathized, slipping her arm through the girl's. "You mustn't attempt to go with Billy. We'll keep him for the night, and we'll take you home."

Tavy turned to her with cold eyes.

"I'm going with Billy," was all she said, and the tone was so quiet in its despair that it must have melted a heart of ice; but there is no ice in the heart of a jealous woman. There is only fire, that burns and destroys.

Billy became conscious that a third party was with them. Oh! Geraldine.

"Great punch, Sis," he told her, with a clumsy laugh. "Whisky in it, though. Tell a drop of it in the ocean. Taste on the tongue, you know. Say, Benning!" He looked back. He felt sure he had heard Benning's voice, but Three-B was gone for his hat and coat. Only Tommy was there, close behind them; good old Tommy. "Hello, Tommy. Going to quit you early. Little girl's tired," and again he patted the icy hand which clung to him.

"That's right, Billy," soothed Tommy, and, setting Geraldine aside with a brusqueness which made her stare, he led Billy and Tavy to the little ante-room just off the vestibule. "Wait just a minute, please. I'm going home with you."

"Thank you, Tommy." Her mind was in a whirl. She was glad to be alone for a few moments. She had many things to decide. Billy followed her into the ante-room. He turned, as if to take her in his arms, but she shuddered and walked away to the window, and he, feeling something uncomprisingly stiff about her, sat down. He was tired anyhow.

Tommy, still in the doorway, noted the drowsy

eyes of his friend with satisfaction, then he returned to Geraldine.

"Come with me. I want to talk with you." It was an order, the first one Tommy Tinkle had ever given to a woman.

Geraldine stared at him in astonishment, and then her eyes flashed with resentment. She lowered them as she met his steady gaze. There was contempt in it. A group of guests came down the hall with Mrs. Benning, but without gayety. The party was ending most uncomfortably. Geraldine walked with Tommy through the conservatory and into the cozy alcove. He wheeled abruptly to her.

"Now what have you done?"

She glared at him defiantly, but the color was receding from her cheeks.

"I don't understand you."

"Yes, you do!" His tone was fiercely tense. "You spiked Billy's punch! There was no whisky in that I drank. Why did you do it?"

"This is an outrage!" Geraldine's eyes now were blazing straight into his. She held them there without deviation, but her cheeks were pale.

"I will not listen to such insult!"

"You will!" He stepped to the tall pitcher

which still stood on the tabourette, and picked up one of the used glasses and smelled it. "There's whisky in this, and you were in here with Billy. I saw you. I've told you more than once, since Billy started to take hold of himself, that if he got a taste of whisky he was gone. Why did you do this?"

"Do you realize what you're saying to me! Do you know that——"

"Don't lie!" The tone of Tommy rose in such hot anger that it startled her into silence. "If you utter another word of denial, I'll send for your father and show him this punch!" and he reached for the push button.

"Tommy!" At last, in that frantically frightened cry, he had a confession, and she realized it as well as he. She sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

"I'll tell you why you did it! You knew that if Billy ever got drunk again it would break his engagement with Miss Stuart; permanently. It's the rottenest thing I ever heard of! A Bowery thief has no worse morals. Sit still, I tell you: you're going to listen; not talk!" This was Tommy Tinkle! good old Tommy, who had fetched and carried, and sat up and barked, and jumped through hoops, for years. "Why did

you do this? Because you loved Billy? No! I thought maybe you did at first; so I wiped myself out. If I could make you and Billy happy I'd have some pay for what I had lost, for I loved you myself. I have loved you all my life; but it didn't make any difference to you; nothing did. You only made up your mind to have Billy because you didn't want to lose one of the dangles on your bracelet. You hated this girl because Billy raved about her beauty, and forgot to mention yours. You hated her because Billy loved her, and you wanted Billy to love you, as you wanted me to love you. The thought that love should have any return never entered into your cramped and starved little heart. So, just to please your contemptible vanity, you were perfectly willing to wreck the entire future happiness of two fine young people, spoil their entire lives! Take down your hands. Look at me. Look up, I say! "

Geraldine was astounded to find herself obeying. It was the first time in all her experience that any one had given her crisp and decisive commands. She was dazed that a stronger will than her own had taken control of her.

"Tommy, I ——"

"I'm not through yet. You've reached the end of your rottenness. Come on! "

He helped her up. She was so bewildered that she could not make up her mind whether to be docile or rebel; but she went with him.

"We're going to do what we can to square Billy with Tavy," he explained, as he led the way out.

"How?" Her voice was meek and humble. She felt that she should be resentful to Tommy, but somehow she could not manage it. She had had her first whipping, and the hurt was a relief!

"We're going to explain to Tavy right now that you spiked Billy's punch," and without allowing any time for a refusal of this drastic plan, he hurried her straight into the little ante-room.

On the threshold he stopped abruptly, just as Geraldine's father, coated and hatted, came down the hall.

The room was empty!

CHAPTER XXVII

THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY

“**B**ENNINGS’?” The voice of Mrs. Stuart was very pleasant. She did not want to be a bother, so she concealed the worry which was beginning to grow on her.

“Yes, ma’am.” A sleepy voice at the other end of the wire!

“Has Mr. Lane left?” She was apologetic. Tavy must be having a delightful time to be so late, but really one couldn’t help worrying. It was because Tavy had never attended a regular party before, she supposed. Mrs. Stuart was not used to being alone.

“Mr. Lane has gone home, ma’am. The party broke up two hours ago. Everybody’s gone.”

“Thank you.” Mrs. Stuart could scarcely pronounce the words, and when she had hung up the receiver, she went to the window and opened it, with an instinctive need for cooling air.

Two hours ago! It was scarcely more than a forty minute ride out to the Bennings’. There

had been an accident! She was sure of it. That had been Tavy's first certainty the night when Billy was late for the theater. It is every woman's first certainty.

Well, what could she do about it? Wait! Nothing else, not another thing which she could do; so she waited, and the dark river which had flowed for countless ages past the spot where she brooded out into the night, flowed on and on, its surface streaked with snake-like swirls of oily black and shimmering light. It was maddeningly monotonous, the river, as it carried its inexhaustible flood of water endlessly down to the ocean. Even the spectral lights, hung high on mast tops, were monotonous as they rode slowly down with the stream. The ticking of the little Dresden clock on the gray mantelpiece was monotonous, but none of these things was so wearisome as just waiting, while anything and everything might be happening out there in the dark world!

She was well-nigh frantic at four o'clock, but at that hour the elevator clicked, and she was at the door! Not Tavy, tired, but flushed and wide-eyed, and full of happiness of her triumph. Not Billy, tall and smiling, and proud, that he had taken away so precious a charge and returned that

charge in safety. Tommy Tinkle and Geraldine Benning!

"Where's Tavy?" Mrs. Stuart's voice had a shrill break in it. "There hasn't been an accident?"

"Not to Tavy." Tommy's tone was grave. "Billy had a slight accident."

She knew! Knew the whole bitter truth.

"Where's Tavy?" The ashes had come back to her face, to her voice, to her eyes.

"With Billy." No whimsicality now in Tommy. "She slipped away with him, to take care of him I think. We've been hunting them for two hours, rather aimlessly. Mr. Benning is down in the car, asleep. I've formed a theory. Tavy is driving about some place with Billy until," Tommy paused for a word, "until he feels better."

Mrs. Stuart motioned them to chairs, but she did not sit down.

"He was drunk again!" Nothing can express the bitter contempt she laid upon that word. "Is there no way to find them?"

"Only by luck," Tommy told her. "I've telephoned to every place with which Billy might be in communication; but no one's heard of him."

Mrs. Stuart walked up and down the floor,

her nails clenched into her palms. Her face was so colorless that her very hair seemed to be turning grayer.

"It is perhaps for the best," she finally decided, extracting what crumb of comfort she could out of that. "It would have happened sooner or later anyhow, and now it is over."

Tommy turned sharply to Geraldine. "Shall I tell her, or will you?"

"Tell me what?" She stopped abruptly, and fastened her gaze not upon Tommy, but upon Geraldine. The girl started to cry, and in Mrs. Stuart's eyes there came a glow.

"Out with it, Geraldine," sternly commanded Tommy.

Then the whole miserable confession, between sobs and tears and pleas for forgiveness; and, as Geraldine proceeded, the glow in the eyes of Jean Stuart burst into flame.

"And you did this to my girl!" she cried. "You, who have everything, did this to my Tavy, who has never harmed any living creature!" She stood quivering with anger, and there rose in her, for the first time in her gentle life, a tigerish lust.

Tommy Tinkle, who could see through words and faces, and even thoughts, raised Geraldine from her chair and led her outside, in her Egyptian

costume, and came back to Mrs. Stuart for a moment.

"Would you rather I'd remain here with you, or shall I go out again and see if I can find them?"

"Bring me Tavy!" she begged. "I want her!"

The black river flowed on and on past the windows, its current streaked with monotonous snake-like swirls of oily black and shimmering white. The little Dresden clock ticked monotonously away, snipping off its tiny bits of time and tossing them back into eternity. The stars paled from their long vigil of the night, and still Jean Stuart did everything that she could do; she waited!

Was there no way that she could reach out through the night, and take her daughter by the hand and draw her home? Was there no way that she could see through the intervening walls and rest her eyes upon everything she had in the world? Was there no way in which she could cast a thought upon the insensate air, and glean knowledge in return? Was there no quarter to which she could turn for help, for news, for even the sound of a human voice? She could wait no longer! She must take part in something active! If she were only to go down on the Drive and over into the next street, to look she would feel

that she was doing something, no matter how futile, toward the ending of this intolerable suspense. What mad freak might a drunken man take into his mind, into what trouble might he not plunge, into what desperate surroundings might he not take Tavy! Her hand was on the doorknob, with a frantic impulse to rush out, she knew not where, and stop what impending danger there might be; but a new thought stayed her hand. Suppose Tavy should come home and not find her there? No, she must watch the endless sweep of the river, and confine herself to that dreary task which has been the lot of women since the dawning of time, to wait!

She was thankful, as she stood in the bay, that she had not succumbed to her insane impulse to leave the room; for it occurred to her, for the first time, that at any moment Tavy might telephone. She realized now, that, all through the long hours, her ears had been strained for the first sound of that bell.

Suddenly she held up her handkerchief and looked at it. She had been tearing it to shreds without knowing it. She must do something, or she would go mad! The telephone; that was her only connection with humanity. With sudden decision, she went to it and called up Billy's number.

It was not the voice of Burke who answered. She knew his broad accents, for she had talked with him two or three times when she had sent trifling little messages for Tavy. It was an older voice, but it was an eager and an alert one, with no sleep in it; Mr. Doe, no doubt, Billy's partner. She had heard something of him.

"Yes, this is Mr. Lane's."

"Has he come home?"

"Not yet, madam."

"Oh." It was a sigh of disappointment, a confession of inadequacy, an appeal. "Thank you."

That was all, and Harrison Stuart leaned against the wall, trembling. He had heard her voice! Jean's voice! He knew it as well as if he had talked with her but yesterday, for her life had not known the terrific changes of his. He paced the floor. Jean! She was alone up there, worried, sick, frantic with anxiety, with desperate misgivings for the safety of her daughter; and his! As he had waited, since a reasonable hour for Billy's arrival at home, so she had waited. As her frantic imagination had devised one frightening picture after another, so his imagination had been at work with its apprehensions. Scarcely two miles apart, they had shared the same solicitude,

the same heartache, the same anguish through all the dreary, lagging minutes of that long night; and she had no one to comfort her. Jean! He had heard her voice, her dear voice!

Dawn. The swirls of oily black on the surface of the never-ceasing river have begun to merge in the swirls of shimmering white, and now a luminous grayness begins to obliterate them both. The stars in the sky are paling fast. In the west, one low-lying cloud, by some magic of reflection, catches the tinge of dull pink, and the lights on the Drive, and the lights in the little enchanted parlor, have turned a sickly yellow. Over the earth there comes that chill which is the shudder of the universe at awakening. Dull day is breaking, and bringing with it its always new burden of sorrow and of tears; happiness for some, perhaps, but not for women who wait.

At last! Just as the low-lying cloud loses its touch of pink and dulls to the gray in which this morning is to shroud itself, there comes a click of the elevator! Again she is at the door, scarce knowing how she arrives there; but it is not Tavy, haggard and worn from her watch of the night, with Billy repentant and humble and ugly with his sin. It is a tall, slender, elderly gentleman with

a silver Vandyke, and, when he removes his hat, a crop of waving white hair.

How strangely the caller stares! He stands motionless! He tries to speak! In the dark gray eyes there is a swiftly gathering moisture, and, for some unaccountable reason, she begins to tremble! Her hands grope flutteringly, then a great flood of light leaps up in her, and they are in each other's arms, the tears of love blinding their eyes.

Jean! Oh, thou good and faithful Jean! Thou true Jean! Thou Jean that has suffered, and borne, and waited! Oh, may all the blessings of Heaven and earth be thine, thou Jean! May there be happiness enough, in the days yet to come, to efface, in part, thy misery in the weary years that are gone! Jean! Jean!

CHAPTER XXVIII

HAPPINESS IS A SELFISH PLEASURE

WHAT should she do with him; that is, just now? Tavy studied Billy in dull silence, as he sat huddled in the corner of the car, asleep. Her repugnance of him had passed. He had not only offended her delicacy, but he had destroyed it, for the time being; and now she calmly took up this sordid, practical question. They were well into the city, by this time, so she told the chauffeur to drive around the Park until she gave him further orders.

She had much to deliberate; for, on what she did with Billy now, might depend what she did with him in the future.

Let her look conditions squarely in the face. First of all, she had no illusions left about her love being able to hold Billy safe against his enemy. Her mother and father had both been right. Through life, Billy might expect to meet this foe at any unforeseen turn, and be beaten by it, and

kicked aside with disdain, a helpless, formless, brainless — what? — Bow-Wow!

That was her first sob, that thought. Tommy had been most kind, but he had not deceived her. They were all the same; Bow-Wow, and John Doe, and Harrison Stuart; and her father! She could give way to weeping now, for she was all alone beneath the stars and the bending trees, all, all alone; for the one who could best comfort her in any affliction, whose strong arm should be her support, whose tender sympathy should be her stay, was huddled there in the corner, locked by numbness in that lax body which could only contain Billy when it was upright. She could weep now, but it was not the girl Tavy who wept; it was the woman Tavy. The girl Tavy was gone, never to return.

Oh, Billy, Billy! Torn by her need of comfort and help, she reached out and put her hand upon him, even leaned over and put her head upon his shoulder. He breathed heavily, and mumbled something in his sleep, and the shoulder of the disturbed animal which slumbered there in stupor, shrugged in impatience at the weight which cramped it. It was the shoulder of a stranger upon which she leaned, and she straightened swiftly, shocked, but not hurt. No, it was too

late to be hurt. That had been done, and the wound had been so deep, so vital, that no other cut could add to her suffering.

Let her dry her tears, let her raise her head, let her be strong, for she needed strength, she who had thought, on that afternoon when Billy had first taken her into his arms, that her days of battle were done, since here was a champion who would wage every warfare for them both; and now her champion, disarmed and dishonored, huddled there in the corner, without a hand to raise in her defense.

Let her dry her tears and straighten her head, and fold her hands together calmly; for now she must approach another grave problem; herself. What of her love? It was given. She knew that, now, but the knowledge brought her no joy. There is this strange thing about the love of such simple natures as Tavy's and Jean's; it can be covered with *débris* of every offending sort, but, scrape amid the refuse, and it is always there. It will survive abuse, it will survive anything. She despised that love, in this black hour, with only the company of the cold stars and the bending trees and the lonely lights which shimmered in the lake. She would have plucked it from her, if she could, but she realized the futility of that even while she

reasoned with herself; and the knowledge was a humiliation to her, as if in herself there was something of baseness, as if she herself were doing something, in loving Billy, which was a part of this degradation he had suffered. It was incredible that in her there was still a spark of fondness for this huddled object, the touch of which had repulsed her, this creature which breathed so heavily in its stupid slumber. Yet she was clear-eyed enough, truthful enough, and unsmirched enough of soul to realize, and admit, that the spark was still there. Very well, then, let her say it, let her acknowledge it, to her shame. She had given her love, and it could not be recalled. Love, which exists, not to be beaconed or dismissed at will. What next? Oh, Billy, Billy!

What next? That was a harder problem than any, a problem she should not have had to face. Why, she was only a little Tavy. That very night she had been a girl, in her dainty little white chiffon frock, with the flush of pleasure in her cheeks, with the light of merriment in her eyes, with imps of mischief twinkling in her glossy black curls. Now, suddenly, she was old, with the burden of womanhood heavy upon her soul. She had joined the ranks of them who have borne the weight of all the world's woes since the world began; and

that Tavy was not crushed by the intolerable weight is the reason the world has lasted.

What next? Not every love finds fruition. There are loves which are the better for stifling. There wander through the world a countless army of silent women who have not dared love where they would, and so have paid the price of dwelling apart, but have completed. Happiness? Possibly not; but self-respect, yes. For a long time she pondered that, while she passed between the swaying branches down the west drive and up the east drive, and across by the ghostly fountain splashing away in its great basin below, its pearl-like drops leaping up to catch the light of the stars, and dropping in glee, after their confinement, to rush away on a long, long journey they knew not where. They were free, those drops in the fountain, free to swirl and eddy and glisten, and tumble over rocks and splash up in foam and spray. Free!

Free? There is no such thing as freedom. Those drops in the fountain were forced through a dark pipe, and their channels were made for them; and so are the channels made for human life. Even let her decide to send Billy away forever, and, cramping her love for him so that it should allow other things to grow in her heart, her future

course was forced upon her. Where was happiness? Where was it kept hidden? There had been happiness in her past, though she had scarcely noticed it at the time, but searching through every nook and cranny of her future, she could not find it again. She could not be happy if she married Billy. She could not be happy if she did not. Very well, then, let her say that there was no happiness for her, except in the joy which she might bring into the lives of others, except as she carried her sorrow in cheerfulness, and with a smile of patience on her lips and in her eyes; the smile of Jean. How well she understood it now. Yes, she would say it calmly and with cheerful patience, here under the far-off, blue, star-studded vault of the sky; there was no happiness for her. What next?

As Tavy saw the gray shadow of that "next" moving before her, she smiled the smile which is never seen but at the summit of the pyre. Duty. And so she came, at last, to the allotted pleasure of all the women of Jean Stuart's strain. From mother to daughter, through a long race, had descended that one great privilege of self-sacrifice; only Tavy had found it young, so young that she had not yet had her youth, only her girlhood. She was thankful, now, for the gorgeous party at the Bennings', even though it had resulted in this

disaster. For once she had seen the glitter of the lights, had heard the languor of the music, had tasted the joy of youthful happiness, before she grew old, and had set upon her raven curls the unburnished and unglittering crown of duty. Very well, then, let it be her duty. Happiness was but a selfish pleasure, after all.

Where did her duty lie? Not to herself. To her mother; the mother who had suffered so many years in sweet patience, who had worn her crown of duty until its lusterless gray had spread into her hair? Yes, much of her duty was there. And to her father; the father who had come back from the dead. They would have each other, the father and mother, and they would be so busy in scraping together the crumbs of happiness which were still left to them, that not much self-sacrifice would be required of Jean. Where else lay her duty? To Billy? He moaned in his torpid slumber. His head hung far forward so that his collar impeded his breathing, but his body was so numb that it only knew it was uncomfortable; so it moaned! She lifted his head and rested it back against the cushion. It lopped there a moment, and settled in a corner. What was her duty to Billy? Three times she passed the fountain, still leaping at the stars, and splashing with weird softness into the

great basin. Three times she passed the gray stone panther on the bank, and the overhanging rocks at the head of the park, and the gaunt, dark hotels at its lower end, and still she was revolving over and over in her mind, as if it were some monotonous Sphinx-like enigma which had no answer; what was her duty to Billy?

Dawn. Over the earth there came that chill which is the shudder of the universe at awakening. Out of the east stole long gray fingers of light, and the stars paled, as if their eyes were dim and sleepy from their long vigil of the night; the fountain splashed in its pool with a metallic ring, as if now it must wake to work, and hammer out the hard prosaic fancies of the day rather than the soft poetry of the night; and the lump which huddled in the corner of the cushions, stirred, and suddenly sat bolt upright, and was Billy!

There was a cold sensation on one side of his face. It had been pillowed upon something warm; Tavy's shoulder. She was just removing her cramped arm from about him. Oh, yes! They were coming home from the Bennings'. Great party! How late was it? All this while he was blinking his eyes and readjusting himself to life. But Tavy's face! How drawn it was, how pale, how hollow her eyes!

"Tavy!" With a sudden flood of memory, he realized what he had done; and hideous contrition gripped him.

"Yes, Billy." The dead voice, but still with infinite sweetness in it, the sweetness of them who have been through the fires, and have been purified thereby of all their dross.

"Tavy! Tavy!" There was something came in his throat which choked his utterance, but he talked above it. He humbled himself in deep abjectness; he poured forth all his regret, all his grief, all his compassion that he had thrust again this shame upon her; but his emotion stirred nothing in her, though she put her hand in his and smiled forgivingly upon him. Then he realized that the end of the road had come, that he must take back his ring, that he must keep his word, that he must not plead for reinstatement, but must go away, so that she might forget him, and the pain he had brought her.

"No, Billy." Her voice was low and calm. She had fought out the answer to her enigma, while the dark sky paled to the dawn and the stars dimmed. "I am going to marry you. I have work to do in the world, some reason for being here; and that is it. You need me."

This again overwhelmed him. He could not

believe that she knew what she proposed. He could not permit her to make the sacrifice. He could not promise, even to himself, that he was safe!

“You don’t understand, Billy,” she quietly told him, and there was that in her strength, in her immense superiority over him, in the towering of her soul into heights where he could not follow, which awed him into silence. “I did not mean that you need me to keep you from this; but that you need me when you have done this.” She was thoughtful for a moment, gathering up the threads of her still unfinished reverie. “We must drive around the Park again. I have not yet decided whether to see mother before or after we are married.”

CHAPTER XXIX

HAM AND EGGS!

NO one heard the click of the elevator, no one heard the hesitant footsteps in the hall; for the long-separated husband and wife now sat in the window, near the dawn, all their story told; and they were hand in hand. The low-lying gray cloud had repented of its dullness at the sight of the ecstasy in their faces, and had snatched from the eastern sky a perfect riot of carmine glory.

At the ring of the bell, however, they hurried to the door, and there, at last, was Tavy, her poor little white chiffon frock damp and wilted; and in her face was the grayness of the dawn, in her eyes the deadness of the morning stars.

"Daddy!" cried the weary voice, and she sprang into his arms; then, after an embrace of but a second, she turned to her mother and drew her to them, and bound them together in her hungry clasp, and wept.

"Where is Billy?" asked her father, as soon as

she was calm; and he stepped out into the hall. No Billy was there!

"He went home," explained Tavy, dropping listlessly into a chair. "I would not let him come up with me."

"Where have you been all night?" Jean. Only tenderness in that question, tenderness and love.

"In the Park, driving." A little hesitation. "Billy — was drunk. I kept him out until he woke up, sober. I meant to marry him to-day; but he refused."

"Thank God!" Her father's tone was like one in grateful prayer. He came to her, Jean's hand in his. "We must send for Billy," and, with infinite compassion, they sat beside her on the window seat.

"I do not want him." Still the dead voice. "I offered him my life." Then she poured out the whole story of her drive in the Park, of the steps by which she had arrived at her decision of self-sacrifice; and Mrs. Stuart's heart sank as she looked at her daughter, for where her little girl had sat, only the evening before, there was now a woman, the director of her own destiny, the arbiter of her own fate, and the bearer, God help her, of her own burdens!

"You will love Billy more for this," her father gently told her. "No good man could accept a gift of which he was so unworthy. And Billy is good." He told them the goodness of Billy, of all that he had done for Harrison Stuart, and as he recounted that tale of sympathy and kindness and whole-hearted helpfulness, Tavy's head came up and some of the dullness left her eyes.

"Moreover, Billy's accident is not to be counted against him this time." Jean Stuart, and her voice had a crisp crackle in it. "He was tricked into it! The punch he drank was made especially for him. There was whisky in it, and it was put there by Geraldine Benning!" The crackle in Jean Stuart's voice became still more crisp. "She made Billy drunk, deliberately to break his engagement with you! She sat in that chair, at four o'clock this morning, and confessed it all, and Tommy Tinkle stood over her and made her tell me! Now, through her jealousy, she's lost both Billy and Tommy!" Every line in her face, every lash on her eyelids, every hair on her head, showed that she was glad of it!

The effect on Tavy was magical; at first, the incredulous horror of what Geraldine had done; and then the joyful realization that Billy had not forfeited his second chance; and then the thought that

she wanted him! She looked toward the 'phone, but her father was already there, and calling for Billy.

Yes, he was at home, and frantically worried because Hal was missing. Would Billy come up to the enchanted parlor, and take part in the family re-union? Would he! It seemed almost no time until they heard a whizzing noise far down the Drive, and then he was there!

"Come in," invited Harrison Stuart with a queer sense upon him of playing master in a house where he had small right.

It was a very humble Billy, even though a very joyful one, who came into the enchanted pink and gray parlor, and a very surprised and thankful one when he found that his pledge was not considered broken.

"I'm the happiest man alive!" he said with a choking voice, as he stood, his arm about Tavy, and saw that there was nothing but affection for him in those three beloved faces.

"Shoulder to shoulder, Billy, side by side!" encouraged Stuart. "We are still on our way, and, when we reach the end of our probation, we'll come up here together and claim our reward; not until then."

Jean Stuart turned to him in surprise, and her

hands fluttered a little way towards him, then she dropped them at her side.

"You're not going to stay?" she asked, with a catch in her voice.

"Not yet, Jean." How straightly his head was poised, with what pride his shoulders were squared. "I have six months in which to prove my right to wear the name of Harrison Stuart."

The lips of Jean twitched piteously, but she looked at her daughter, where Tavy stood by Billy's chair, and she conquered the great longing which welled up in her. It did not seem possible that he should go, now that he had come to her after all these years; but Tavy must be happy, and perhaps these two men could fight out their long, hard battle together better than they could apart. Once more Jean Stuart took up her privilege of self-sacrifice; and she put both her hands on her husband's shoulders.

"If you think that will be for the best, dear, then it shall be as you say."

"Why, it won't be a separation, Jean." He kissed her, and held her at his side. "We are going to come courting every evening, and we'll show you what two fine young men you have. Eh, Billy?"

Billy shook hands with him. He shook hands

with everybody. He did not feel much like talking just now, but he fairly ached to shake hands. His good fortune was too overwhelming to be true, and it rather had the effect of choking him; and when Mummy Stuart, patting his hand and looking into his eyes with a fondness which it was hard to have to conceal, said: "You've been a good Billy to him," Billy was compelled to hastily excuse himself, and went into the dining-room alone, to inspect the gold fish.

What a world of reminiscence there was, by and by, when everybody was calmed down, and they could talk without emotion. Nearly everything anybody said reminded somebody of something which started in a laugh and might have ebbed in a tear, except that there were so many other things to come; as for instance:

"Now we can have Daddy at the theater with us! Has he told you, Mummy, how he used to sit back under the balcony, with Billy's opera glasses, and watch nothing but us through the entire play?"

Then all that had to be told; and how Billy had visited every Stuart in the city before he found them; and how Hal had made Billy describe everything they wore and every article in the room, after that first visit; and how Billy had made

fraudulent excuses to come again, first, so he could tell Hal more about them, and then so he could see Tavy; and how Hal had stood out in the cold rain and watched the windows of the house in pleasant old Vanheuster Square; and the intricate schemes which had been devised to get money to them; and Billy's invention of the poor little daughter who died so horribly in the theater fire; and an excited jumble of many other things! Of course the secret popped out about the house which was being selected for the home-coming of the royal princess!

It was not to be such a gray day, after all. The misty sky was clearing, as the sun came up, and the river, which had been so black, was dancing and glinting with countless sparkling wavelets. The laugh of Tavy came back, and even Jean laughed with a note in her voice which had not been heard there for many, many years; and the men raised in spirits as they saw they had made these two women happy once more. But the two women, looking into each other's eyes, saw there what the men could not see; the shadow of the specter which was never to disappear!

By and by came an apple-faced little German maid who slept out, and her china-blue eyes widened in astonishment, as she found there, so early

in the morning, a dignified elderly gentleman with a silver Vandyke and waving white hair, and Billy Lane! The sight of the china-eyed maid gave Mrs. Stuart a happy idea. She suggested breakfast, and her guests brightened visibly.

By and by, again, there was a strange moment, when these four sat down to the table together for the first time; but, in a few minutes, they were quite a little family party, much as if they had all belonged together for a long, long time. If the shadow of the specters were still in the eyes of Tavy and Jean, there was nevertheless a semblance of happiness, much as good as the real article, in the little white and tan dining-room. It was so good to be together, so inexpressibly good!

There was a ring at the bell, and the apple-cheeked maid came through to answer it. Immediately there appeared in the door of the dining-room one dishevelled T. Tinkle, his topcoat buttoned to hide his dress suit. He had come to report that he could not find a trace of Tavy and Billy anywhere! T. Tinkle took one comprehensive survey of the party at the table, and then that whimsical grin spread upon his wide face..

"Ham and eggs!" he cried, and drew up a chair.

CHAPTER XXX

CALLERS FOR JOHN DOE

TREMENDOUS sensation! The office of William Lane, Engineering Architect, sprang flamingly into the public print. It had captured the Pittsman prize for the most notable structural iron engineering feat of the year; and, on a crisp winter morning, large, noble portraits of William Lane appeared at every breakfast plate! Alongside was a picture of the wonderful dome over the Arts and Sciences building! It was a triumph, but the unexpected honor brought small joy to Billy Lane. The marvelous floating dome was Hal's creation, and now Harrison Stuart would not take the credit for it. This was merely because Hal's year of probation still lacked a month of its completion, and he would not announce himself; so Billy was miserable. While they were still at this argument and at Burke's curried omelette, the ladies, bubbling with joy, called up to congratulate them. This was

Billy's first chance to vociferously declare himself an impostor.

At the office the controversy broke out afresh. The Pittsman jury of awards had mailed the check, and the medal, and the engrossed honor parchment, at the same time it had given out the information to the newspapers; and now here was the money, a hundred thousand dollars, endorsed in the name of William Lane. William Lane promptly endorsed that check to John Doe, and carried it in to Hal, and thrust it in his hand.

"I'll keep the honor for a month to accommodate you, but I'll be jiggered if I'll keep the money!" he declared.

"You'll keep half of it!" as firmly announced Hal. "Now don't be foolish, Billy. You had some share in that floating dome. As a matter of fact it never would have been created but for you."

"Rot!" scorned Billy. "I only said it would be a gorgeous thing to do, but that it couldn't be done. Then you went to work and did it."

"That looks to me like an equal division of labor," and Hal was tremendously relieved to find this solution. "The only fair thing I see is to divide the money."

"I won't accept it!" Billy squared his jaws with stubborn determination.

"And I won't accept it!" Hal slammed the check on the drawing table between them, and there it lay, despised and useless.

There seemed no way out of that deadlock, and the difficulty existed until Tommy Tinkle, who dropped in towards noon, decided the matter, in a twinkling.

"If you don't want the money, give it away," he advised them, his whimsical grin illuminating the office. "I'd take it, except that I'm selfish and don't want to add to my burdens. But why don't you go to the bank and get one hundred one-thousand-dollar bills, put fifty of them in a blue box and fifty in a pink one, and present them to the ladies? I claim the honor of making the presentation speech."

They nearly shook the arms off Tommy Tinkle for that clever disposal of their dilemma; and, the next night following, the blue box and the pink box being ready, they all three went up to the enchanted apartments, and Tommy Tinkle made a presentation speech, full of foolishness and good will, and the quintette held a celebration.

Tommy was with the courting party a great deal these days, for he was lonely, and there was a somberness on him which needed much gaiety to relieve it. A change had come over him, and it was

due to Geraldine Benning. Since he had been a very small boy, Tommy Tinkle had enshrined Geraldine in his heart as a goddess without flaw and without imperfection. Now that she had, with her own hand, shattered that idol into minute fragments, Tommy found an aching vacancy in his heart corresponding exactly to the space the idol had occupied. So Tommy, for his gaiety, went, quite logically, to the place where there always brooded a somber specter which needed to be fought off with gaiety.

By winter, however, the specter had been driven well into the background, and only now and then its shadow was seen in the patient blue eyes of Jean and in the luminous dark gray eyes of Tavy; but sometimes, even in the happiest moments, an unexpected word or sight would bring back a flash of hideous memory; and this is the price of wretchedness, that memory never lets it die; it only slumbers.

For the most part, however, there was nothing but joy in the enchanted apartments, and the endless current of the river, passing the cozy little bay window, seemed to be bearing towards them only ecstasy. That had been a glorious summer and fall, for never were two belles courted more assiduously than Jean and Tavy Stuart. There

were the regulation flowers and candy, and drives and picnics, and excursions and parties, with Tommy Tinkle frequently, and in great glee, wielding the baton in this melodious quartette of love.

These, however, were only the ordinary activities provided by a pair of unusually ardent wooers. The great, the marvelous, the overwhelming enjoyment was the house of the royal princess! It had been bought, at last, and paid for out of Harrison Stuart's own earnings, a beautiful little cottage, in sight of the river and within three quarters of an hour of the city, and with ground enough to build another cottage; spacious lawns between, shaded by towering old trees. And for whom was that new cottage to be built? Billy and Tavy, of course! The plans were being finished, and it was to be erected while they were away for their six months' study of the architectural engineering of Rome, and Egypt, and Paris, and almost everywhere. So it was a very busy Jean and Tavy and Hal and Billy, and there were scarcely enough hours in the day to get through it all, what with the furnishing of the house for the royal princess and the brain-tearing problem of the new honeymoon cottage. For instance, should the billiard-room be just off the dining-room, or would it be better to have it lead off the library?

You see how important that could be, don't you? Then the tiny little pink and gold boudoir. Should it have latticed French windows, or Colonial? A trifling detail? Certainly not; for the solution to that tremendously important question would dominate the artistic treatment of the entire house!

Of course, the men had business to look after, but the ladies were equally busy at those times, for there were trousseaux; two of them. And such wonderful hand embroidery was never wrought into filmy fabrics as that created by the patient fingers of Jean and the loving ones of Tavy; for now all the skill which had been lavished on the gay little court lady dolls was brought into urgent requisition. As Jean worked, her eyes grew constantly brighter, for they were set constantly asparkle by an agreeable gleam from her finger. Oh, yes, she wore a new diamond ring; one just like Tavy's.

There was an added dignity on the night Tommy Tinkle presented the blue and pink boxes, for now they were ladies of business, with property in their own names and money to make them independent. Careful and cautious ladies of business they were, for the very next day they bought safe and solid bonds which would yield them a comfortable income; while Hal and Billy, glowing with pride in

this beautiful achievement, plunged furiously into work, so that they should not be behindhand when the flood of new commissions overtook them.

There was only one cloud in Billy's happiness; the floating dome itself. The congratulations he received among his fellow members of the profession "got on his nerves," and especially at the T-Beam Club, where, at his first appearance, they swallowed their jealousy, and surrounded him with a solid phalanx of hearty good will. The floating dome was not a mere personal achievement; it was a gift to the profession; and for this, Bravo Billy!

"Nothing like it!" Billy had all he could stand of obtaining praise under false pretenses. "I only wish I had devised the floating dome, but I can't take the credit for what doesn't belong to me. The thing was invented by my partner, John Doe, and it's a corker!"

"Then why isn't John Doe a member of the T-Beam Club?" demanded jovial old Ainsley Pulham, the president of the organization. "Bring him around."

"All right," agreed Billy easily, knowing that Hal would not come for another month; but this was the easiest way out of it.

To avoid further importunity, Billy stayed

away. During the following week, however, the name of John Doe grew and grew! The floating dome was not a matter to be taken lightly by those who so thoroughly understood and appreciated it; and, moreover, the firm of William Lane had become too important for any factor of its tremendous success to be overlooked!

So, one bright noon-time, Ainsley Pulham with a jolly committee from the T-Beam Club, stormed the office of William Lane, and demanded of the snub-nosed office boy to see John Doe. They not only demanded this, but they followed right into the private office of the dignified elderly gentleman with the silver Vandyke.

"Mr. Doe, this is the handshaking committee of the T-Beam Club," vociferously announced the gayly shrivelled president. "Get acquainted. I'm Ainsley Pulham. This is Walter Hess, fat but sassy. Henry McCullough, The Beau Brummel of the club. Dick Morton, our best little drinker. T. M. Weatherby, famed as a sweet singer. Write us a check for a hundred dollars, John Doe, and sign this application blank."

"I'll send it to you," diplomatically evaded Mr. Doe, pushing back in his mind the painful memory of a disgraceful orgy and an expulsion at the T-Beam Club. When he again became Harrison

Stuart, his first act would be to reinstate himself there; so he would manage to hold off that application blank for three weeks. However, he shook hands pleasantly with Ainsley Pulham. No recognition in the keen blue eyes of Pulham. Walter Hess, a man new in these fifteen years. Henry McCullough. Why, Henry had been a dapper boy, the youngest member, in the long past time. Dick Morton; rollicking, careless, devil-may-care Dick, at whose elbow —

“By George, it’s Harrison Stuart!” Dick Morton’s voice thrilled with joy. The years had taken the hair from him, and robbed his cheeks of their ruddiness, and put gold in his teeth, and rounded him with prosperity; but they had not touched the heart nor the spirit of him; and here was Dick, shaking both of his old crony’s hands, and slapping him on the back, and pushing him around to T. M. Weatherby, and Ainsley Pulham and Henry McCullough, for further handshaking and back slapping and vociferous welcome.

Why, it was Harrison Stuart come back! Stuart, the daddy of them all, the most glittering name in the profession, the authority, even after fifteen years, on the fundamentals of constructional iron work! Harrison Stuart! Why, God bless us, old man, there’s only a few of us left,

but we hold you in our hearts and our memories in affection and pride!

Yes, they did, in spite of all that he had done, they held him in their memories and in their hearts with affection and pride; and here they were, crowding around him with such a pandemonium of welcome that the snub-nosed office boy debated seriously the turning in of a riot alarm. No such disgraceful proceedings had occurred in that office since earnest young William Lane had started to pay more rent than he could afford.

"Now you can't get out of it! You have to come!" Ainsley Pulham, and he was jamming Harrison Stuart's hat on his head, rear side foremost.

They backed him into his coat, they jostled him out of the office by main strength, they thrust him into an elevator, and downstairs, all of them laughing and howling like schoolboys, Harrison Stuart laughing with them, though there were tears in his eyes. They crowded into a machine, and whizzed away for lunch at the T-Beam Club!

CHAPTER XXXI

HONOR UPON HONOR

“**T**HE quivering question which agitates me is what will Tavy wear?” This was the greeting of Tommy Tinkle, as he entered the enchanted pink and gray apartments, with a roll of evening papers under his arm.

“Where?” Tavy stopped embroidering a violet on something which looked suspiciously like a yachting collar, and Jean Stuart came hurrying in from the adjoining room with an embroidery frame in one hand and a work basket in the other. “Tommy Tinkle, where!”

“To the banquet.” Tommy aggravatingly sat in the bay window, with a nonchalant appearance of not meaning to give any more information until it was dragged out of him.

“What banquet?”

“At the Hotel Nabob. Pleasant weather, isn’t it? Looks like snow.”

Mrs. Stuart laughed and sat down opposite Tommy. She came into the parlor every time she

heard his voice, for fear he might say something funny and she not hear it.

Tavy took a deliberately painstaking stitch in her violet, and affected as great a degree of indifference as Tommy Tinkle.

"A little warm for snow, don't you think?" she drawled. Another painstaking stitch. "Still, it was snowing this time last year. I like the snow, don't you? Tommy Tinkle, if you don't tell me all about this banquet, I'll scream!"

"Then I'll wait until you do," and the aggravating Tommy lit a cigarette. "Oh; I might add that the banquet is to be given by the T-Beam Club." He cast a sly glance in the direction of Jean Stuart. She had dropped her embroidery frame in her lap, and was gazing at Tommy with quiet patience. She remembered the T-Beam Club! "There will be just a few guests in the ladies' gallery after the coffee, and I'm wondering if Tavy will wear one of the new trousseau gowns, or just a regular frock. Oh; I might add that the banquet is to be in honor of Harrison Stuart."

"Tommy!" cried Tavy. "They've found him out!"

"Everything. They know that he invented the floating dome. They know that he's Billy's partner. The T-Beam fellows came up to the office

and got him, while Billy was out. They arranged for the banquet on the way to the club. It's a week from to-morrow night. So the newspapers know it; and now, Tavy, you have a regular daddy."

Mrs. Stuart was half laughing and half crying, but Tavy was clapping her hands.

"So they're glad they found Daddy!" she exclaimed.

"Glad? They're crazy." Tommy handed them the roll of afternoon papers which contained just the first announcements of the tremendous sensation. "Now, ladies," and Tommy flourished his cigarette, "trust me. I am your friend. I hurried up here to beat the reporters. Billy is handling them at the office, and Burke at the apartments. Harrison Stuart is hidden. I think there is a reporter in the hall by this time," and, sure enough, the doorbell rang. "Disappear," he told them. "The romance is Billy's. It's as good as the little daughter who was burned in the theater fire, but not so horrible."

To see Tommy Tinkle handling reporters and guarding the ladies in their retreat would have been a joy, and it would have been a revelation in the art of sympathy to hear him tell how Harrison Stuart lost his memory for fifteen years,

through a fall from a roof, and wandered all over the world, under the name of John Doe, until he was brought back to memory by the sight of his old friends in Billy Lane's office!

That was a busy week in the enchanted apartments, a busy and a proud week, for the papers were full of nothing but the marvelous romance of Harrison Stuart, of his tremendous achievements, of his dignified position in the world of structural engineering, of his pictures, front view, profile, and three quarters, standing, walking, and riding in a machine, working, laughing, and smoking a cigar. There were pretty stories, too, about the charming wife and daughter who had waited for him all these years, and of the enchanted parlor, and the paper on its walls, and the shape and color of the piano, and the pattern of the rug, and other important details. Pictures, too, of the charming ladies. There was no escaping that, for the whole neighborhood was alive with clicking cameras; and, if the papers didn't get good pictures they would use bad ones, or forge some. So Tommy Tinkle, with a proper pride in his friends, saw that they got good ones. Some of the papers insisted on engaging beautiful Tavy to Tommy Tinkle! They were rather friendly to the newspapers, the Stuart ladies, because, while

the reporters made life a burden to them for three days, everything was so superlatively complimentary; and there was not one hint anywhere of the enemy which had really robbed Harrison Stuart of his memory, and of everything else worth while.

Honors heaped upon honors! Behold Jean and Tavy Stuart ushered by Tommy Tinkle into the ladies' gallery of the Hotel Nabob, and screened behind a Moorish jalousie, upon which, by some magic, had grown a purple-blossomed vine without roots and without earth and without water. Below, under the tons of ceilinged gold and stucco, and beneath the tons of crystallized chandeliers, and attended by so many waiters that the place is black with them, sits the T-Beam Club, a sombre looking collection of black-clad gentlemen, all with crinkly or shiny shirtfronts, and all with stiff-looking white bow ties, and all miserably solemn, as is proper at a banquet, for now the coffee has arrived and the speeches will begin.

What a disappointment! Of course the banquet table is shaped like the cross section of a huge T-beam, with the toastmaster and the principal speakers in the center, and the unimportant new members far away at the flanges, but the seating is so arranged that a fat man hides the guest of

honor almost completely from the view of the ladies in the gallery; and if they shift, he is more completely hidden by one of the two absurd Corinthian columns, made of flowers and bearing huge lanterns upon which glow the club monogram; so the ladies stay where they are, and get such glimpses as they can of the bald spot at the radial center of Harrison Stuart's gray hair. Sometimes he moves and then they can see a part of his face. Once he leaned far back, and they saw his silver Vandyke. It was a thrilling moment!

Now the toastmaster. Ainsley Pulham, of course. He raps for order, with a gavel the head of which is naturally from the cross section of a T-beam; and he drones along for half an hour, with many an elaborate joke, and many a sentimental quotation about their beloved and distinguished fellow member, who has come back to them, out of the great sea of oblivion, to take his rightful place in their hearts. A toast, gentlemen, to our beloved and distinguished fellow member, Harrison Stuart, the most valuable jewel in the glittering diadem of the profession! (Prolonged applause.)

With a will, they drink that toast to Harrison Stuart, and he drinks with them in sparkling water, untroubled by the glass of yellow champagne

which hisses at his hand. Far down the table, Billy Lane leans forward to catch the eye of Hal. Billy drinks the toast in wine. He has no cause to be afraid of that, and he turns and lifts his glass toward the jalousie lattice, which permits the ladies to see and not be seen. This lattice is a grievous imposition, for Tavy frantically waves her handkerchief at him in answer to that up-raised glass; but he cannot see it. Billy is in plain view, and that is a comfort, for he is the handsomest and most distinguished looking young man there; by all odds!

Now the response. The guest of honor is on his feet, modest, unassuming, but his heart deeply touched by this tribute they have paid him — after all that he had done! A neat little speech, but quite short, and in a low voice, and full of thanks.

Ainsley Pulham again. "The Floating Dome," that new marvel of the structural world, and the response will be made by that phenomenally brilliant and successful young engineering architect, William Lane, the partner of the famous Harrison Stuart!

No low voice here. Billy Lane, in a deep rich, baritone, tells them all about the floating dome, its inception, its beauty, its value, its development of

a new principle of construction which will revolutionize the science! Who would ever have thought that Billy Lane was such an orator? With sure control, and smooth words, and rounded sentences, and contagious enthusiasm, he made the floating dome as interesting as a page out of the Arabian Nights Tales; but, when he came to the inventor of that marvel, then indeed he rose to heights of eloquence, for here was a topic upon which he could say his say with a full heart and sturdy belief! His voice pulsed and reverberated throughout the length and breadth of the banquet hall, vibrated amid the crystal of the chandeliers and the stucco and gold of the ceilings, throbbed into the ladies' gallery, penetrated to the innermost recess of Tavy Stuart, so that she fairly quivered with the pride and glory of it all! Were there ever two such remarkably clever and brilliant and majestic men as Harrison Stuart and Billy Lane? Never! And in the burst of stupendous applause which followed, Jean and Tavy Stuart laughed and laughed for joy, and wiped their eyes, and held hands.

More speeches, with Ainsley Pulham in between, sometimes getting his jokes mixed, and sometimes delivering in advance the meat out of the next speaker's talk, but always fresh and smil-

ing and tireless, and so abundantly supplied with words that it was a wonder there were any left.

Dick Morton, on "The Good Old Days." Henry McCullough, on "The Wedding of Iron and Concrete." Walter Hess, on "The Future, What of It?" T. M. Weatherby, on "Fifteen Years of Iron."

That was a most interesting speech to Harrison Stuart. It told him, in the concise and logical phraseology of a man thoroughly versed in the technique of his science, the exact progress, step by step, of structural iron work from the time Harrison Stuart died until he came back to life. The man who had been away during those fifteen years listened in abstracted concentration, and, now and then, as he gave his rapt attention to the speaker, sipped from his glass, not noticing that he was drinking the champagne. That habit came back to him naturally and without thought, after fifteen years of absence from banquets, just as the habit of politeness had come back to him. The waiters passed quietly down along the table, and set little decanters of after-coffee brandy at close intervals.

There were other speeches, some droning and dry, some frivolous and enlivening, some tensely interesting from a technical standpoint; but late, towards the close of the evening, when the ladies

in the gallery were painfully fighting off drowsiness, and Tommy Tinkle was doing everything he could to keep Tavy and Mrs. Stuart awake, there suddenly burst a new voice on the assemblage.

"Whisky!" The tones were startling in their coarse raucousness. "It's the curse of the world!" The voice rose to a senile shriek. "There is no hell but whisky! Drink! It's the enemy of man and God! It burns the body and it sears the brain! Whisky!"

There was a shriek from the ladies' gallery. It was not Harrison Stuart who swayed there, his face flushed and puffed, his bleared eyes half closed, and his lips formless; but a beast, an animal, a Thing from another world. It was Bow-Wow!

CHAPTER XXXII

IN THE SILENCE OF BLACK NIGHT

THEY wanted to wait for him, those two stricken women in the gallery, to take him home with them, for in their hearts was no resentment, only pity. But Tommy Tinkle would not let them. He sent word to Billy that he had them in charge, and took them home, and said what consoling things he could. It was not much of a lapse, it was more excitement than anything else, Billy would have him all right in the morning, such things were to be expected, and wasn't it a stunning speech that Billy made!

Yes, such things were to be expected, and that was the awful tragedy of it. Again the spectral shadow claimed its firm seat in the blue eyes and the dark gray, and the Stuart women took up the allotment nature had made for them.

Billy telephoned them shortly after they reached home. Hal was resting quite comfortably now. He had not drunk very much. He had sipped at his champagne without knowing it, and then he

had taken some of the brandy, and of course, with the taste of that on his tongue, he did not quite realize what he was doing. He'd be fine in the morning, and, after all, it was more the excitement than anything else.

But Billy knew better. Hal's first act, when they had left him alone for a moment to prepare his bed and his medicine, had been to rouse from a seeming lethargy and snatch the decanter! Burke came back in time to seize it from him; but already he had swallowed the equal of a tumblerful, and, laughing with a gurgle in his throat, he let them put him to bed. Almost as soon as he laid his head on the pillow, he dropped into a profound stupor.

"It's a damn shame — beg your pardon, sir — after the fight he's made." This was Burke, and he helped Billy off with his coat and vest. "I think I'll sit up and watch him."

"I expect you'd better," decided Billy, and he put Hal's hands under the covers. The window had been opened, and it was rather cold in the blue room. "Call me if he's any trouble."

So Billy, heavy-hearted, went to bed, and Burke made himself comfortable in robe and slippers, and put another log on the fire in the big lounging-room, and sat with pipe and paper. Mr. Stuart

slept very well, indeed. Burke went in to look at him about twice an hour, and once, by accident, he dropped a metal tray with a terrific clang; but there was no waking the man. Burke went back and sat on the big leather couch, and looked into the fire, and thought on the Widow Maloney with particular satisfaction; for he had carefully concealed from her that in two more weeks he would be sailing over the seas and far away, with Mr. Billy and his pretty bride. Otherwise the determined Nora might marry him. Two more weeks! Pretty little Miss Tavy, God bless her, would make a beautiful bride; two more weeks and the royal princess, she was a sweet-minded lady, God bless her, would move into the new house, and Harrison Stuart would come into his own again; and might he always be happy, and prosperous — and safe! So, pleasantly musing, Burke nodded his head lower and lower, and fell into the dead sleep of them who sit up late o' nights.

That numb carcass which was Bow-Wow stirred uneasily. Something was wrong. There is no resisting the ultimate command of the body. When it is born, a mind and a soul spring into existence. When it has reached its time to die, the mind and the soul have no say in the matter; so, in this life, the body is always supreme. It de-

mands to be fed, to have its thirst quenched, to lie in slothful slumber; and if it be refused these things, it ousts mind and soul.

The body of Bow-Wow commanded his mind to awaken; and it did; awakened to its full strength, to its full intellectual capacity, to the full measure of its understanding; and all those mental powers were comprised in one muttered word, which broke huskily upon the silence of black night:

“ Whisky! ”

Bow-Wow opened his eyes. Darkness, shot with glimmering light. He reached out his arms. Space! Groaning, he sat up, painfully, and endeavored to locate himself. Through the windows there came the faint illumination of the street, and the moist, cold air of the snow. A door stood ajar, letting in a slit of dim radiance from the room beyond. Bow-Wow shivered. He was thinly clad. He was trembling, too, from head to foot, with a strange nausea.

What was this thing which had happened to him? He was in a luxuriously furnished blue room, and on a bed of easy mattresses and clean white linen. He had no more memory of this room than if he had never seen it before. He had come into this house in a drunken stupor, he

had lived a year of clean life, and now he was in a drunken stupor again, a torpor which joined and linked itself almost without joint to that other torpor, blotting out the intervening year as if it had never been. How had he come here? In all his fuddled consciousness he could find no trace of an answer to that mystery; and the effort at any thought, further than his physical self, wearied and weakened and sickened him. He gave up, the vague and feeble attempt at reasoning, and returned to the one idea which he could comprehend; whisky!

He rose and tottered out of the room. He found himself in a softly carpeted hall. There was a light at the end, a flickering, wavering red glow. With many a stop for breath, and strength, and steadying of nerves, he edged along the wall until he reached a large lounging-room, comfortable with leather chairs and couches, where a half spent log in the fireplace cast the ruddy reflection of its dying flames upon well chosen pictures and queer objects of art from every quarter of the world. Dazed, bewildered, he stood, swaying, and blinking stupidly at the fire. There was a redheaded man in a lounging robe asleep on the couch. Bow-Wow did not know him.

Whisky! He looked all about, and now oc-

curred a strange phenomenon. In Bow-Wow's mind there was no memory of this room; but his body remembered! It led him automatically to the lounging-room table, the library table, the buffet, the pantry. No whisky! He must have it! There was a burning in him. There was fever in his veins, and yet he shivered with the cold.

"Whisky! Whisky!" His quivering voice started in a whine and ended in a wail. Automatically he wandered back to his bedroom, and then again that queer memory of the body directed his sodden mind. He knew a barrel-house which kept open all night. Mechanically he opened the cupboard and drew down the first clothes he found, a plain brown business suit, and dressed himself with quick, nervous little jerks. As unconsciously he took money from the drawer in his dresser and stuffed it in his pocket. These things were done as independently of his mind as if he had been a clock-work figure. Whatever grain of actuating intelligence he had was centered on the one thing; whisky! The taste was on his tongue!

He passed out through the lounging-room, and, as his eyes fell on the red-headed man asleep on the couch, he moved stealthily. Instinct pointed out the red-headed man as a foe, as a detaining

force; and, aside from his need for a drink, the inherent prompting for freedom had come upon him. He was cramped here. He began to be aware of coercion, and there is no human soul so debased, so feeble, that in its depth it does not resent coercion.

From Billy's room there came the sound of deep and regular breathing. It meant nothing to Bow-Wow, no more than all this unfamiliar furniture. In that chair he had sat night after night, as Harrison Stuart, and had dreamed his dreams and planned his plans. It meant nothing. In that seat by the window he had conceived the daring solution to the problem of the floating dome, and on the wall above it, illuminated by the ruddy glow of the fire, was a beautiful water color sketch of the floating dome in completion. Nothing. Near the door was the telephone. How many nights and mornings, in the past months, had Harrison Stuart stood and talked to Jean and Tavy.

Stop, you Bow-Wow, who hold, confined within you and cramped into some hidden recess, the soul of Harrison Stuart! Here, at last, is something which will rouse that numbed mind — two exquisite portraits just opposite the blazing fire; Jean and Tavy, pictured with the skilful brush of

Tommy Tinkle, so that there seems almost consciousness in the loving eyes, words upon the tender, curving lips! These at least should arrest him. His bleared gaze passes over them stupidly. He turns the latch, he walks into the hall, he closes the door softly behind him, he descends the stairs, he walks out into the street.

The dawn is streaking the sky, just such a dawn as that which broke upon him the morning he found Jean; but it carries with it no association, as he lurches down the street. Something at the curb catches his eye! It is the blackened and dampened butt of a cigar. He stoops and picks it up. Righthand pocket.

CHAPTER XXXIII

HARRISON STUART CONQUERS HIS ENEMY

EARLY morning in the Sink. Damp and cold outside, damp and cold inside; but a fire in the big cannon ball stove was doing its best to dispel the eternal gloom and the eternal chill which hung in this section of the Inferno. The morning bartender was on duty, a pin-eyed man, with broad cheek-bones, and a low forehead, and a thin-lipped wide mouth set so low down that it seemed to cut off his chin when he spoke. A shivering and quaking figure came through the door; Red Whitey, out from whatever warren he infested. They are early risers, these whisky drinkers. A beer drinker sleeps later.

There was no conversation between the bartender and the customer; for Red Whitey was not yet alive. With infinite fumbling, he fished a nickel from his pocket and dropped it on the bar, and the worn looking bottle came out, together with a small glass. Red Whitey put his hand around

the top of the glass so that it would hold more, and poured it full to the top of his finger, and lifted it to his mouth with three separate jerks, the pin-eyed bartender looking dully on. This style of drink was allowed to regular customers, for the first morning's morning. After the drink, Red Whitey, with a shudder and wry face, shivered over to the bench near the stove and sat down, and waited for the drink to take effect. It would warm him awake in a minute or two.

Pittsburg Joe. He slouched in, shivering and rubbing his hands. His shirt was open at the neck, and his thin coat hung on him like a wilted rag, covered with stains of so many sorts and ages that it looked like a record of crime.

"Some cold, Bo." His voice was so hoarse that it might have been a late fall bull-frog's. He reached up under his arm-pit, and, from some mysterious recess in the coat lining, he produced a much folded and soiled dollar bill. "Ladle out a schooner."

The glass of beer forthcoming, he emptied in it some crystal-like powder from a red pill box, stirred it with a bar spoon, and drank the mixture slowly but steadily, without seeming to swallow, much as if he were pouring it into a funnel. The effect was almost instantaneous. He shook

his shoulders and his eyes brightened. He began to talk volubly, with a curious break from his hoarseness to a metallic shrillness. He told where he had been the past month, and all that he had done, with a dozen contradictions in his wasted lies; and when the bartender had enough, and walked away, Pittsburg Joe sat by Red Whitey and told him the rest of it.

Tank Tonkey came presently, as big of girth as ever and as pendulous of chin; then two more of the old winter guard; then Piggy Marshall; and the day's business at the Sink was fairly begun. It consisted of sitting and warming, and waiting for some one to buy a drink; and it was largely a silent business, requiring much quiet concentration. Only the voice of Pittsburg Joe kept shrilling on and on.

The pin-eyed bartender looked up in astonishment as a quite unusual customer came through the door. He was an old man in a neatly pressed suit, but without shirt or collar or tie, his breast being covered by a silk pajama jacket. His face was waxen-white, his eyes were bleared, and there were huge puffs under them, his lips were formless, and even his silver Vandyke seemed to be scraggly and distended from the loose puffiness of his skin. Every muscle of his face was laxed,

so that his countenance was filled with putty-like lines.

"A little whisky," he asked, and threw some money on the counter; a bill; five dollars.

The pin-eyed bartender hesitated a moment, then he reached under the bar and produced a bottle of labeled whisky. From the same hiding place he produced a gentleman's glass.

The new customer, with a formless smile at the size of the glass, stretched his hand around its brim, and poured until it was full to the top of his finger, and lifted it jerkily to his mouth, and drank; while the bartender rang up a double drink, and threw out change for a four-dollar bill. He laid the other dollar beneath the bar, for slipping in his pocket, later.

"Kind o' cold," he observed, by way of friendly encouragement.

Red Whitey was all aquiver! He edged over close to Piggy Marshall and whispered in his ear:

"John Doe!"

"Bow-Wow!" Piggy spoke quite confidently, but he sat still, and studied the new customer with perplexed professional interest.

Red Whitey motioned Tank Tonkey to come closer.

"You don't suppose it's Bow-Wow!"

Tank Tonkey shook his head.

"I dassent make a guess," he husked.

Red Whitey, trembling with the eagerness of a rat terrier, turned to Pittsburg Joe.

"Say; is that Bow-Wow?"

"Naw!" The contempt of Joe for the asker of that question was profound.

"Well, go lamp him, that's all I say," advised Red, his curiosity at the shaking point. "Go lamp him!"

"Sure." Pittsburg Joe was ready for anything. He had that in him which gave him extreme confidence in himself. He could jump over the Brooklyn Bridge if he tried. He looked back and winked three times, as he crossed to the bar and lounged near the stranger. He made a thorough inspection, and still was doubtful, but he winked prodigiously. "Hello, sport," he ventured.

The new customer, clumsily picking up his change, turned slowly and gazed at the intruder with heavy lidded eyes, swaying and nodding, then a formless smile came upon his lips.

"Hello, Joe. Have a little drink."

Bow-Wow! They were over at the bar as one man, and he knew them all; he called them by name! They clustered round him like flies!

The pin-eyed bartender wiped his hands briskly on his apron and got ready for business. Bow-Wow had put his change back on the bar in front of him, and drew it in a heap.

"Have a little drink."

Would they have a little drink! They would, as many as Bow-Wow would buy! The bartender reached for the labeled bottle, but Red Whitey stopped that economic waste.

"Regular stuff for him, Phil. You don't know this guy. He's one of our old buddies. Name's Bow-Wow."

"Hello, Red." A husky, guttural voice, each sentence interrupted with labored breathing. "Have a little drink."

Others arrived, for the rulers of the kingdom of rest were at their city home now. The season of their reign was past. They came in apathetically, one by one, but as they saw the throng at the bar, each quickened his pace to eager briskness, for the day's business promised to be good.

Bow-Wow had more money, plenty of it, and he did not notice that, in paying for the constant succession of drinks, he broke bills with astonishing rapidity. He did not notice that the pin-eyed bartender kept out an average of twenty percent for himself. He did not notice that coins slipped

away on all sides, from his heap, and that even bills disappeared, as his change was dumped in front of him. Except to see that the little glass was set before him frequently, he did not notice anything; that his hands were white when they should be gnarled and black, and that his nails were polished and well-trimmed, when they should be stained and ragged and black-rimmed; that these were malodorous creatures who hung upon his shoulders and slapped him on the back, and called him Pal, and Bo, and Buddy — and Bow-Wow; that the floor was a filthy mire, that the atmosphere was fetid and foul; that gradually what little there was left in him of the semblance of God's own image was dropping away and leaving him to be submerged in his loathsome swinehood! And the swine in him was happy. It was being drenched with whisky.

Jerry-the-Limp. He came in more briskly than the others, but when he saw the throng at the bar, his leg shortened, and his mouth took on a piteous droop, and he came forward limping.

"Get in, Jerry!" sang Red Whitey, bold as a lion now. It was he who hung the most on the provider of the feast. "It's Bow-Wow!"

The change in Jerry-the-Limp was instantaneous. His leg came down, the droop went out

of his mouth, his beady eyes glittered, and he began to snarl, even as he pushed his way through the industrious men of business.

"So it's Bow-Wow!" he shrilled. "So you've come back, you white-whiskered stiff! So you got drunk, eh, and they gave you the toss!"

Bow-Wow looked around at him slowly, with a nodding head and dull comprehension. His heavy-lidded eyes focused as best they could.

"Hello, Jerry. Have a little drink." That, and "A little whisky" were the only words his thick tongue had formed since he came into the Sink.

"Don't ask me to have a drink!" Jerry's hand, quite by accident of course, pushed a bill from the edge of the bar. The bill fell to the floor, and he put his foot on it. "Do you know what you done to me?"

"Aw, cut it, Jerry; Bow-Wow's all right! He's a good buddy!" Red Whitey made that intercession. He was desperately afraid that the happy program might be interrupted.

"Shut your yawp!" Jerry-the-Limp had regained his ascendancy. It was the triumph of mind over matter. "We came up for a friendly little call, and you handed us the toss, didn't you, you white-whiskered stiff!" He shook his fist

in Bow-Wow's face. His little eyes were glaring vindictively and his snarl displayed all his red gums. "You turned us up to Mike Dowd, didn't you!" His claw-like hand grabbed Bow-Wow at the shoulder and shook him, for better attention. "You got me in a scrap with my pals, and I got four months on the rock pile! I cracked rocks for four months, I did; four months, in fine weather, and me with my poor crippled leg! I'll show you!" and he turned Bow-Wow roughly around to face him.

At last the sodden Bow-Wow, intent only on supplying his one great need, knew that he was annoyed.

"Whisky!" he suddenly husked. "It's the curse of the world!" His voice rose shrilly. "There is no hell but whisky! Drink! It's the enemy of man and God!" The creature's fists were clenched and his eyes were glistening, as his voice rose to greater vehemence. "Whisky! It burns the body and it sears the brain!"

It was Piggy Marshall, who, with one of his rare flashes of memory, suddenly recalled the great joke. He knew now why he always chuckled at the mention of Bow-Wow's name. It was the regular climax to this set speech. He suddenly reached over Jerry-the-Limp's shoulder and gave

Bow-Wow's whiskers a violent yank. That was the great joke!

Here again came that strange memory of the body. The Bow-Wow of old had sunk so low in his torpidity that he had lost all power of resentment. The Harrison Stuart of the past year had brought his body up to manliness; and it was his body which now struck impotently out at Piggy Marshall, but landed its fist on the snarling mouth of Jerry-the-Limp!

With a scream of rage, Jerry plunged for him. Bow-Wow backed to avoid the blow. Tank Tonkey, just behind him, stepped aside, and Bow-Wow fell to the floor, hitting his head on the iron foot rail. He lay stunned, for a moment, and Jerry-the-Limp made ready to kick him and stamp him, until the long pent-up glut of vindictive rage should be appeased; and the others would have allowed him to do it, for that was the rule of the game in the Bowery.

Jerry-the-Limp was just drawing his heavily shod foot for the first kick at Bow-Wow's face, when there landed on his shoulder a hand so weighty and a grip so sharp that it nearly extracted the shoulder bone! The hand was like a great slab of pickled meat with fingers hewed roughly in the end, and it belonged to Mike Dowd!

"Here you!" bellowed Mike, and he shook Jerry-the-Limp until his teeth chattered. "You duck before I smash you! You're barred from this joint, you shrimp!" and he flung Jerry backwards, without looking where he landed, so violently that he crashed against the door with a grunt. Finding himself so handy to egress, Jerry-the-Limp, who was a quick thinker, promptly jumped outside and hurried up the Bowery, with a total disregard for his poor crippled leg.

In the meantime, Mike Dowd leaned down to pick up the fallen combatant, and, as he did so, he stopped, with a catch of his breath.

"St. Patrick, it's —" He paused at the name.

"It's Bow-Wow!" A hoarse and husky chorus apprised him of that fact.

"Get back, you!" roared Mike. "Set down!" and they sat.

He had picked up the fallen man, whose eyes were staring wildly about him, and now led him behind the bar, where there was a chair at the forward end. It was comparatively clean, here. It was Mike's drawing-room.

"I am sorry to see you this way, friend." He was careful about names, even though he was leaning over and speaking in a low voice. "I knew there'd be a come-back some time, though, and I

knew you'd break here. I guess it's lucky you did. Need a little drink of something?"

Harrison Stuart shook his head.

"Thank you," he tremulously returned. "I'll be all right." The fall, the slight contusion of his scalp, the slight flow of blood, had shocked him out of his stupor.

"Now you just set still and rest, and I'll call up Billy. He'll fix you," and Mike went to the telephone at the other end of the bar, while the pin-eyed servitor plodded back to the dusty and blackened barrels at the rear of the room, to fill the bottles for the day. Mike asked for his number, but there was a long wait; a busy wire. At that moment Jean Stuart was trying to call Billy, to ask how Hal was, and Tavy, hollow-eyed, was standing at her side. They had no answer, for Billy and Burke were still sound asleep. They did not know yet that Harrison Stuart was gone!

So he had failed, failed within two weeks of grasping the crown of his long waiting! Even through the fumes which bewildered his brain, he realized it all. He had been drunk! He was here in this foul hole, not as a curious spectator, but as one of its brutalized habitués. He could never trust himself again! He could never summon sufficient confidence, nor yet sufficient strength,

to fight through that battle for another whole year, much less for the balance of his life! Jean! Tavy! He had come into their lives only to disgrace them again! And how often would he do it in the time to come? With a moan of anguish, he rose from his chair and walked down to the center of the bar, to look at himself in the mirror, conscious, while he did it, that, to add to his humiliation, all those decrepit wrecks of humanity over against the wall were watching his every movement and leering at him. He turned to the narrow mirror just above the open cash drawer, and what he saw, in the bleared and distorted face, chilled the blood in his veins. He almost stopped his breathing, and looked and looked, and read the full depth of his degradation!

At last Mike Dowd had his call. By some trick of the switchboard, he had the wire before Jean Stuart.

"Billy Lane's?"

"Yes." The sleepy voice of Burke.

"Billy up?"

"No, sir — yes; he says he's awake."

"Well, tell Billy this is Mike Dowd. There's a certain party down here, he'll know who ——"

There was a deafening explosion, a concussion as if all the air in the room had been compressed

and then suddenly released, a jingling of glasses, and then a heavy fall. Mike Dowd dropped the receiver and ran to the huddled figure. Harrison Stuart was crumpled on the floor in a shapeless heap, at his hand the revolver snatched from the cash drawer. Harrison Stuart had fought his last battle with drink, and had conquered. He had found the way to keep from ever falling a victim to whisky again. He was dead!

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE ROYAL PRINCESS COMES HOME

IT was in solid black that the royal princess came home to the beautiful cottage. In the heart of the royal princess there was a sorrow which would never quit it; but Harrison Stuart, when he passed out under the shadow of tall elms, on his way to rest, took with him the specter of fear, which, for so many years, had shadowed the patient eyes of Jean. And he had given her a parting gift; peace!

After they had come back from that solemn journey to the city of the dead, Billy drew Tavy aside into the little room which was to have been her father's sanctuary. There was suffering in his face as well as in hers, but in him, too, there was some strange new thing which had come to him because Harrison Stuart had died.

"I am going away," he told her, holding both her dear hands in his, and gazing down into her dark eyes as if he must look, and look, to fix them within his vision for all time to come.

She drew closer to him.

"It is because I am not yet free," he went on. "There may be men who can drink in safety; but I am one of those who can not. The death of Hal proved to me that even the most rigid abstinence is not sufficient. It will not do to say that I will never have the taste of whisky on my tongue. I must be able to endure that taste, and conquer the desire it arouses in me. The taste on the tongue! Tavy, I am not yet secure against it; and there is a reason greater than you or me why I have no right, with this curse upon me, to make you my wife; that reason considers those who cannot agree that they are willing to bear the wretchedness I might bring upon them — the unborn."

She drew still closer, nestled against him, and he folded her in his arms, though he stood stiff and straight. If he dared bend to her he might weaken his resolution, and to hold to it was, even now, costing him his heart's blood.

"So, Tavy dear, I am going to spend my life, if need be, in the conquering of this enemy, and I have no right to hold you bound. There must be no pledge between us."

Mutely she stripped the ring from her finger and laid it in his palm, and looked up at him. There flowed between them that pure love which

is infinitely greater than the giving of self to self! He stooped, and kissed her upturned lips; and then he walked out under the shadow of the tall elms. That day the firm of William Lane ceased to exist, and William Lane dropped out of the ken of men as completely as Harrison Stuart had done. And the snows of winter fell on the beautiful cottage of the royal princess, and the birds of summer sang in the tall elms outside Tavy's windows.

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Spring. Bright color everywhere. Flowers peep up in the woods, flaunt themselves at the roadside, and cluster with particularly loving fondness around the beautiful cottage of the royal princess. Bright color everywhere in the beautiful cottage, for there is scarcely a room which has not its vase of gay flowers. Even on the big mahogany desk there is a huge bowl of apple blossoms, which Tavy places there every season. Her father had been very fond of them, and Billy had been fond of them.

Billy is much in her mind to-day. Perhaps it is because the air has in it that same quality of balminess which it had on that day, so long ago, when

she and Billy had walked around and around Vanheuster Square, listening to the triumphant song of the lone robin. Five years of cheerful purpose had brought to Tavy a new beauty. The black hair is just as curly, the deep gray eyes just as luminous, the oval cheeks are just as delicately tinted, but about the red lips and about the deep eyes there has grown that sweetness which comes only to those who have learned to suffer without bitterness.

Five years had added to the whiteness of Jean Stuart's hair, but they have added nothing more to her, except the reward of her peace. As she comes into the room now, where Tavy is arranging the apple blossoms in the bowl, there is a great similarity between mother and daughter, though they look nothing alike, and one has youth and the other age. The similarity is in the expression about the eyes and lips, that expression of the sweetness which repays those who will suffer without bitterness.

"There's a caller for you, Tavy."

"Tommy Tinkle?"

"No." A peculiar smile on Jean Stuart's lips, and — why are her eyes suddenly so bright, and moist, too, as she slips her arm around Tavy's

waist? Why is it that, though she smiles steadfastly, there is a twitching in the corner of her lips and a trembling in them.

“Who then?”

“A gentleman; an old friend.” The arm around Tavy’s waist holds her closer, but the smile is steadfast, though the moisture in the eyes increases. Why, there are tears glistening on her lashes! “In the parlor, Tavy.”

There is a sudden catch in Tavy’s breath, a sudden pallor in her face, and then she steadies herself. When one learns to suffer without bitterness, one has learned to have only very quiet emotions.

“Were you glad to see him, mother?”

Now the two tears which trembled on the lashes roll down the faded cheeks, but the smile, though it quivers still, is steadfast.

“Very, Tavy dear, very glad, and very happy, and very proud!”

She withdraws her arm from about her daughter, and takes her by the shoulders and looks deep into her eyes, and kisses her. Then Tavy walks into the hall and up toward the parlor. Outside the door she leans her hand against the wall, for her knees have a sudden curious notion to bend, and her breath has come short, and she feels that

she has no color in her face; so she waits a moment. Then she draws aside the portières, and stops on the threshold.

There he stands near the window, big and strong and handsome, and there is no need to ask him any questions, as she looks into his clear eyes, which somehow, like her own, have grown the better for the cultivation of suffering without bitterness.

For a long, long space they stand motionless, as if their hungry eyes must first be satisfied, then she is in his arms, and he is kissing her over and over and over, and telling her again and again and again that he loves her! And they are never to be parted any more, and she holds out her finger for her ring, and there is no trace in her eyes of the specter of fear!

There is a brisk footstep on the porch, in the hall, in the room. Tommy Tinkle, good old Tommy, with the whimsical grin upon his wide face, and just behind him comes Mummy Stuart, hurrying lest he might say something funny and she not hear it.

“Well, Tavy, I suppose Billy’s told you that he’s been all over the world, and owns a diamond mine, and had a beard when he came home, and Burke shaved it off an hour ago so you’d be sure

to know him, and — he hasn't? Why, I don't believe he's told you anything! Mummy Stuart, what do we have for lunch?"

THE END



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